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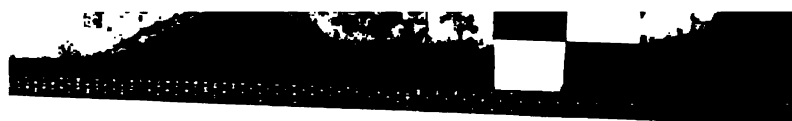
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The . . .
Golden .
Kingdom



Andrew
Balfour



AFRICA - BOER S



THE GOLDEN KINGDOM



The . . .
Golden .
Kingdom



Andrew
Balfour

*BEING an Account
of the Quest for the
same as described in the
remarkable Narrative
of Doctor Henry Mor-
timer, contained in the
Manuscript found with-
in the boards of a Boer
Bible during the late
War, and edited with
a Prefatory Note . .*

DRAWINGS BY G. K. GREEN

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Note on the Finding of the Manuscript of Doctor Henry Mortimer

IT was, if I remember rightly, on the 29th of February, 1901, that the regiment of mounted infantry to which I was attached as a Civil Surgeon paid a visit to the house of a certain Nikolaas Mortmeyer, a Boer farmer of the Carolina district of the Transvaal, on the borders of the high veldt. The owner was absent on commando, being a field-cornet who had achieved quite a local reputation for his "slimness" in outwitting and surprising isolated British detachments. The farm, which stood deserted, was ransacked in the search for rifles; but while the troopers were thus employed I turned my attention to the contents of the chief living-room, and discovered, in a cupboard, the customary family Bible. It proved to be a huge and weighty volume, bound in vellum, fastened with three massive and brazen clasps, and was evidently an heirloom of considerable antiquity.

These Bibles of the Boers are always interesting, containing as they usually do a family tree upon the fly-leaf, and a record of important events, written in faded ink and crabbed or straggling handwriting, with dates inserted which carry one back far into the past—often to the old days in the Colony when the Dutch lorded it at the Cape, as they would fain have done again.

The fly-leaf was lacking in this book, and I turned the pages idly, finding them dirty and thumb-marked and stained with tobacco-juice. The leaves of the Book of the Revelation rustled

under my fingers ; and then, at the very end, I came upon a mass of faded papers, stitched into the cover between the print and the back-board. For a moment I imagined that I had stumbled upon a copy of the Apocrypha ; but I was undeceived, and began to examine it closely and with interest, finding there was a writing in English, and, in addition, a peculiar old chart and a bird's-eye drawing done in black and red ink, remarkably fresh and distinct.

"Boot and saddle," however, was the order ; and, the Bible being too heavy a burden on a hot day and for a long ride, I merely removed the adventitious portion, and crammed it into my haversack. At my leisure I perused it, and discovered it to be the curious and surprising tale here given to the world. I found it decidedly entertaining ; but I was out of the reach of books and papers, and so cannot tell whether it is likely to engross the general reader.

Still, it possesses certain passages which may prove of interest at the present juncture, especially those dealing with the habits and customs of the early Dutch settlers and the wild condition of Natal.

Whether or no this Doctor Mortimer ever existed is quite another question, though the name of the modern Boer farmer is distinctly suggestive. Some may also be disposed to ask if this roving physician was not a prodigious liar. We are bound to be suspicious of any writer who protests overmuch, and the worthy doctor, who was clearly somewhat of a prig, is very anxious to justify himself. It may be that the narrative was the work of some hunter in the old days, storm-stayed or an invalid at a Boer farm. But in certain particulars the tale smacks of truth. For instance, there did exist such a custom as the shooting at the papagaai, and the description of Bubolongo and the Natal uplands tallies with that of Dampier. Van Riebeck's name is given in the old spelling, as is the word "Kaffir," while in other ways the story treads the skirts of history.

It would appear that Doctor Harry and his companions flourished at the close of the seventeenth or the beginning of the

eighteenth century; and certainly at such a date it was easy to encounter remarkable adventures on the high seas, or still more upon the high veldt in the untrodden fastnesses of Southern Africa. This we know from the journals of the survivors of many shipwrecks—notably that of the Portuguese vessel, the S. João Baptista, curiously enough mentioned in the text.

It is idle, however, to speculate, and needless to say more, except to state that, while the original has of necessity been considerably altered, an attempt has been made to retain some of the old-world flavour of the manuscript, although the trimming and the re-writing may have introduced not a few anachronisms. These may, perhaps, be pardoned; and the reader may rest assured that the main facts and chief items have been most carefully preserved.

One suggestion only may be advanced. The description of the great plateau of Godwana must suggest to anyone who knows the Eastern Transvaal, the district of the De Kaap and the Devil's Kantour. If this was indeed the spot reached by the adventurers, and which passed under the sway of that peculiar seafarer Corkran the Coxswain, then is the irony of fate apparent, for at the present time Kaapsche Hoop is a rich auriferous region, and Doctor Mortimer and his company did in reality sojourn for a time in a kingdom of gold, and yet remained ignorant of its hidden wealth. I shrewdly suspect, however, that Nicholas Corkran was not the man to be hoodwinked, and probably he soon discovered traces of the precious metal, and perchance even "made his pile," to use a modern colloquialism.

Be that as it may, so dauntless a spirit as these men exhibited deserved some reward; and if Henry Mortimer found a fair maid, and Jacob Little that which he sought, it is but charitable to imagine that the old man of the Americas was not wholly disappointed after his dogged endeavours, despite all obstacles and dangers, to reach the object of his quest—the fabulous, yet alluring, Empire of Monomotapa.



CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE MAN IN THE SNOW	11
II. CORKRAN THE COXSWAIN	22
III. THE EVIL EYE	37
IV. THE BAUBLE IN THE BEARD	50
V. A SON OF ANAK	64
VI. THE SHOEING OF THE STALLION	72
VII. A STATE OF SIEGE	84
VIII. THE SONG OF THE SMITH	94
IX. BOUND FOR BANTAM	106
X. ABOARD THE <i>Kittiwake</i>	114
XI. THE RIVER OGOBO	126
XII. THE HAUNTED SLAVER	137
XIII. THE HAMMER OF THOR	146
XIV. A TRIPLE PERIL	157
XV. AT LOGGERHEADS	167
XVI. THE GREAT APES	177
XVII. THE SKELETON AND THE SEA SCOURGE	191
XVIII. WE MAKE THE LAND	203

CHAPTER	PAGE
XIX. WHAT BEFELL ON ROBBEN ISLAND	217
XX. THE CHALLENGE	231
XXI. THE PAPEGAAI	244
XXII. THE YELLOW CATS	256
XXIII. TERRA DE NATAL.	270
XXIV. THE CROSS AND THE TALE	283
XXV. THE PAINTED CAVES AND THE POISON POTS.	298
XXVI. THE GREAT SWAMP	312
XXVII. ICHABOD	325
XXVIII. THE KING AND CIRA	339
XXIX. THE SLAYING OF THE SIX	354
XXX. FOR LIFE ITSELF	366
XXXI. THE RIVALS	376
XXXII. WE FIGHT FOR THE KING	388
XXXIII. THE KING'S DECREE	400
XXXIV. THE TRIAL BY COMBAT	412
XXXV. VAARWEL !	420

THE GOLDEN KINGDOM

CHAPTER I

THE MAN IN THE SNOW

It was in very truth a vile night, the vilest of the winter, and that winter no green yule-tide. I was weary, and had been wet ; all day in the saddle, my grey mare fetlock deep in slush and snow, and the saddle-bags, damp and soaking, swinging against my knees till my very joints were stiff. Weary, and a trifle out of spirits at the dull round of life, the prosaic duties of a village leech, the empty house which had greeted my return, and above all the thought that when others rested from their labours I was yet in harness. Mistress Pumphret, the squire's lady, was taken with an ague and like to die, so that at any moment there might come a rat-a-tat at the oak, which would mean for me a weary trudge with lanthorn and lancet, and no cosy bed and sound slumber.

"A poor, drab, colourless life," thought I, and yet God knows I did wrong to complain, however silently. Was I not in a well-padded chair, stretched, for the nonce, at my ease before the blazing logs, doors and windows fast, the hangings drawn, a steaming tankard of ale, spiced and mulled, at my elbow, a clay stem between my teeth, and, above all, my leather-bound friends to keep me company ? Nay, more, was I not young and strong, free from ache and pain, with no thought of woman, with no sick child, and so inured to wrestling with death and striving to ease

pain that the woes of my few patients did not harass my resting hours? Beyond doubt I was a surly dog, surly and ill-conditioned, but—for there is ever a but—it was just because the life blood coursed strong and full in my veins, just because my brain was ever busy, and that I hankered after change as a lass after her lover, just because I was in some manner a fool, that I had become thus tinctured with the bile of melancholy.

I placed the long churchwarden on the little table, sent a stream of blue smoke towards the low ceiling, and gat me to my books, taking that which came the handiest, and on which I had been busy on account of the squire's lady, who was in the grip of the fell fen fever. It was a bulky tome in the Latin tongue, but with a prefix which set forth that the learned writing came from the brain and pen of Rhazes the Arabian. It had cost me a fair sum at Leyden in the days when, having finished my apprenticeship, I had taken ship across seas and studied in the schools of Holland. Great times were these, with companions to my liking; but now, beyond the vicar, a fat man and fifty, much wedded and needing my services each year with a monotonous regularity, I had not a kindred spirit in the parish—the broad, flat, inland parish of sluggish streams and sluggish men.

The title, deep-stamped and gilded, caught my eye. The book was a treatise on the fevers and febriculæ of swamps, marshes, and morasses, and the very words bore a dreary significance. Had I not ridden past such all day and every day, miserable stretches, with here and there the pollard oaks shooting long, bare branches upwards from their snow-capped boles, frozen wastes where boomed the bittern and over which hovered the starving hawk? There came the sough of wind in the wide chimney, and the patter of hail upon the window glass. I stared at my jack-boots, reeking and toasting on the hearth, shivered as though one were treading on my grave, and reached for the tankard. Ere ever it touched my lips, however, I paused, for a sound struck upon my ears—the sound of singing. No words could I hear as yet, merely a burden of song welling up in the darkness without, but full of a weird merriment. "Mercy on us!" quoth I; "what strange wight is this who traverses the

The Man in the Snow

13

village street on such a night and in such a mood?" I placed the tankard beside the pipe and hearkened diligently. It was a man's voice, full and rich, yet with every now and then a hiccougging catch in the notes which but intensified the pureness and volume of such as sounded true. I had heard singing at many a *verbindung* and merry gathering of roystering students, but never so queer a mixture of rollicking mirth, of fearsome eerieness, and yet through it all there ran the plaintive whine of the ballad-monger. The voice was for the most part magnificent, the air itself had something unholy about it, but it was not till I heard the words of a verse that I sprang from my chair and the hair bristled on my head.

There is no doubt I was tired and overwrought, for, after all, there was nought so very terrible about them, yet hearing them for the first time as I did, miles from the sea, on a wild night, in a still and lonely village street, they set my nerves quivering like the strings of a harp struck by strong fingers.

A blatter of frozen snow dashed on the panes, drowning the sense of the song which was taking shape and meaning, and then as the storm lulled a moment, the voice swelled out close at hand, beginning with a jerk and crack as though forced from a harsh windpipe by some rack and handle, and then swinging into time and measure, powerful, mellow, and deep-throated:

Sing hey! for the grin on the dead man's face,
For the slicing knife and the lean carcāse,
For the bird with the beak and the last man left,
For the stranded boat and the shark bereft.

Yo, ho, ho!

Let the dead men go

To Davy Jones, who waits below.

Before the last line was at an end I had dragged the hangings aside, undone the shutters which were fitted on the inner side of the window, and was gazing out into the darkness. A gleam of candlelight shot past me and made a chequered pattern of the lozenged panes on the stretch of white which mantled the erstwhile muddy street. All else was black as ink, but as I gazed

the bent figure of a man came stealing into the yellow triangle, and a sing-song voice besought me for succour.

"An alms, for the love o' Christ, and of your charity!" cried the man in the snow.

Heaven knows I was for shutting out all sight and sound of him, being chilled to the marrow by the horror of his lay; but as I hesitated he came straight towards the window at a shuffling run and pressed his face close up against it, raising both arms, and clawing at the casement as though he would force an entrance in spite of me. Men say we surgeons grow callous, that we become hardened to the sight of suffering, and that our bowels of compassion are dried up, save in so far as we are forced to make pretence for the sake of filthy lucre.

In some measure it may be so, but what sent me to the door that night to usher in so undesired a guest was the look of wolfish hunger in the man's eyes as his lean face stared into mine.

Had I not turned the key and shot back the bolt that look would have haunted me till my dying day, though for that matter I had been spared the strangest of strange adventurings and the writing of these remembrances, which none may ever scan. If such be not their fate, let the reader judge whether or no he would have had me set the door open with hands which trembled, though not with haste, the while I half feared to meet the creature who, in the dead of night, with footfall muffled by the snow, and in the most astonishing of voices, was seeking his sustenance by a wild song of the sea from an inland folk who slumbered.

The chill air smote me as I set my head without the porch, where in the summer roses climbed and clustered, an angry gust quenched the flame of the candle I had carried with me, and then something slid softly past my elbow, and as I turned I saw a man's figure vanish within my own door, which was immediately closed and locked and bolted.

So sudden and startling was the change, that I stood stock still in astonishment.

A moment before I had been about to play the host, the good Samaritan, and now by all that was unchancy I was standing in

The Man in the Snow

15

my own porch in small shoes and bare-headed on the dirtiest night of the year, and my own door had been shut in my face. The tables were turned with a vengeance. The ballad-monger was tenant of the cottage, and I, its rightful occupier for five lean seasons, was cooling perceptibly without it. Cooling in body, but in a mental fume at the scurviness of the trick. "Malediction on the rogue!" I muttered; and again, "Confound the rascal!" The odds were so plainly with him. There was a door at the back, but it was barred, and old Dame Pottinger, who cooked and cleaned for me, slept elsewhere, coming in the morning and going at night. There was no one else in the house but this mysterious villain, in whose eyes burned the light of hunger. The windows I had myself fastened from within; there was no feasible access from the roof; I could not descend a chimney. By all the fiends! what was I to do? I did the last thing that was to be expected—I burst into a shout of laughter not wholly mirthful. It was promptly answered from within the door.

"Hee, hee!" came a rasping chuckle, and again "Hee, hee!" and then the curious, creaking throat-jerk which I knew heralded a song, followed by another verse of the infernal ditty, sung this time with an air of unmistakable triumph:

Sing hey! for the lad on the lonely isle,
For the signal flag and the firing pile,
For the knife-notched stick and the sail at last,
For the lass at home and the perils past.
Yo, ho, ho!
Let the mariner go,
For it's Jack that can tell what the sea doth show.
Yo, ho, ho!
Let the merry man go,
Fuddled above and primed below.

At the outset the melody was close and clear, but towards the end it grew fainter as though receding, and I knew the man had left the passage and was making for my well-warmed room. A second later he was within it, and as the verse concluded, I judged he was somewhere near the hearth, the table, and, a plague on his impudence! my nightcap of sound old ale. In

a twinkling I had run to the window, the snow soaking to my feet, the bitter blast making my ears tingle and searching to my very vitals, for I had no cloak or cover-coat. It was now my turn to thrust my face to the glass, to feel the hail strike on the nape of my neck, to experience it melting on my hair and trickling down between the neck-band of my shirt and my creeping skin. There was my own chamber plain before my eyes, though somewhat gloomy, save near the fireplace.

One candle I had taken with me, the other scarce served to dispel the shadows; but, aided by the ruddy glow from the faggots, it was sufficient to show me quite enough for my purposes. A bare-headed man stood with his back to the fire, to my fire!—and such a man. His hair, of which I could not discern the colour, was a tousled mass like a ship's mop; the side of his face on which the light fell was of the leanest; his nose long and high; his cheek hollow, as though sucked in by his breath; his chin sharp and protruding; his mouth, a slit; and the hue of the whole skin something between a rich copper and the whitey-brown of a rotten apple. From beneath his chin a beard depended, a straight straggle of grey hair like that of a billy-goat, and there was something set in it which glittered in the candlelight.

For the nonce I paid no attention to the fellow's clothes. I was wholly absorbed with the half of his visage which was visible, and the grin which sat upon it. For the man was grinning, gloating over the prospect before him; and as I watched he stretched out an arm of surprising length, as I noticed even then, and seizing the tankard, hove it upwards to his mouth, tilted it towards the ceiling, and quaffed its contents at one huge gulp. Replacing the plain metal mug, he passed the back of one hand across his lips, and, as I am a truthful mortal, picked up the pipe—my pipe!—and hastily sniffing at the bowl commenced to pull at the stem with the utmost satisfaction, continuing the smoke where I had relinquished it, for the weed was still alight and glowing. This was too much, however, and I tapped loudly on the glass with my knuckles, and called out with a fine effort at sarcasm:

"Your pardon, my good sir, but you will find a fresh pipe in the cupboard, and a fresh fill in the jar shaped like a negro's head upon the mantelshelf."

His answer came readily enough.

"Ay, ay, my master, and is that so? Well, this is good enough, I trow, for a poor devil who has not whiffed for a week; only the stem is a trifle unhandy, and my stumps do not fit the grooves of your sharp ivories, so here goes!"

With that, and all this time he had continued to look straight in front of him—with that, I say, he snapped the pipe stem some two inches from the bowl, stuck the stump into his slit of a mouth, and fell a-puffing once more with great good humour.

For a moment a surge of anger swept through me, and I was for smashing glass and frame, and bundling through and making for his scraggy throat. Somehow I knew it to be scraggy, though his coat collar was turned up and hid it. The mood passed as quickly as it came—my sense of humour saved me, for in all this there was something ridiculous in the extreme. The smug look, the broken pipe, the empty mug, myself disconsolate, the villain triumphant—it was inimitable! Furthermore, I had it in my heart to love this rascal, despite his confounded familiarity. We had not a thorough blackguard in the whole parish, nothing but drab respectability, with a most genteel church-going and an insufferable dulness over all. Clods! clods like the earth they hoed and ploughed, good honest fellows full of beef and ale, and garbed in homespun and rig and furrow hosen, but not a rogue amongst them. And the women! Well, I had no eye for them, though now and then, as I knew, one was weak, as is the way with maids. I scarce blamed such, so great the monotony of their colourless lives, and God knows they were not evil nor the lads real miscreants, though at times sots and selfish. To be sure, the squire drank like a fish and looked like it; but, Lord love you! he was nothing but a pesky bore with his eternal vapourings anent his great stallion, and how to feed cattle, and how his old dame fared. No, we had not a thorough-paced scoundrel in all Bishop-Solingford except—and of this I was very certain—the man with the mahogany face and the

glittering speck in his beard who was making so free with my belongings.

My rage vanished and again I laughed—laughed till I shook and the tears came to my eyes, and the more I laughed the less could I stop laughing. What added to my merriment was to see this sailor man (for by this time I had taken in the cut of his coat and the sheen of his buttons) pick up the learned tome. "Here is something he will scarce digest so well as my nut-brown," thought I, and then became wholly afraid for the first time since I had clapped eyes on his face, for I perceived that the pipe had gone out and that he was seeking the wherewithal to light it.

The one thing on earth that I loved was my stock of vellum and of leather and of manuscript, and to see this fellow about to tear out a page, and that not the fly-leaf nor the blank at the end, was more than I could stand. I raised my elbow to drive it through a lozenge, and then I paused irresolute, even as the man had paused. He was no longer holding the book carelessly and at a distance, but was peering at it intently, turning it so that the candle should illumine the type, and to all appearance reading it with understanding. Here was a new marvel, that this rough rip, this shell-back, this old man of the ocean could master an ancient and foreign tongue, could find an interest in a treatise as ponderous as the volume which contained it!

He turned the leaves quickly, the pipe fell from his mouth, his lips worked, his forefinger traced the lines. It was plain he was familiar with the Latin, and equally plain that he had no great acquaintance with books, and followed the sense with difficulty.

Suddenly he sought the title-page, whereon, as I remembered, my name was written, along with the date and place where I had acquired the tome, and—for I was careful in money matters—the price I had paid for it. He scanned it all, and then laid the book on the table almost reverently.

"If you have done," I shouted, "I would be glad to join you at the fire," for of a verity the cold was becoming unbearable.

For the first time he turned his full face in my direction, and I saw he lacked an ear on one side, and had a livid scar running from his outer eye angle to where his auricle should have been.

The grin was gone; he was sombre in aspect and somewhat fierce in expression.

"Fair and softly, Doctor Henry Mortimer," said he, "fair and softly, my young master; there is to be somewhat of a bargain between us ere ever you melt the snow from between your toes."

He came towards the window as he spoke, and so long were his arms that, as they hung by his sides, his finger tips reached well below his knees. His manner of speech surprised me. I had expected his converse to be as rough as his outer man, but such was not the case. His voice was harsh indeed, as though sea salt had got into his weasand and formed a crust upon its walls; but his manner of speaking was what is common amongst gentlemen, although he had to talk loudly for me to hear him.

"A bargain!" I cried; "it will be sufficient if we call quits, I fancy. You have amused me hugely, but——"

"There it is," said he; "you have hit upon it, Doctor Henry. I like your spirit, else you might have shivered out there till cockcrow for all I cared."

"Gad, sir!" said I, "you take things coolly; let me tell you that if I wished I could precious quickly have a pack of decent men hustling you to a pretty tune."

"Ho, ho!" he cried, "so you think so, do you? Well, I have heard the like before. Hustling, say you; but to hustle one must be fairly near, and what think you of these barkers, Doctor Henry?"

He threw open his coat, and as I live, his naked skin confronted me; no undervest, no shirt, no singlet, nothing but a narrow sash of red above his baggy breeches, and the butts of two pistols sticking upwards from its folds.

"Man!" I cried, "you must have been perished with the cold!"

His face softened perceptibly, and he grinned again.

"You may say so," he shouted, "and yet I have stood worse ere my beard was this colour," and he plucked at his straggle of grey hairs, and fingered the little ornament set therein.

"And the bargain?" said I.

"To be sure, the bargain," he rejoined. "Stap me! but you

are a good lad, and I have half a mind to waive the privilege of my position."

"I would willingly waive mine," I answered.

"So I should suppose; but all I ask is what one Christian should give another, a night's lodging, food," and here his voice grew eager, "food, and a trifle in the way of underclothes."

"And for this," I cried, "you have put me to inconvenience?"

"Believe me, I regret it," he answered; "but it is better to dictate than to beg. God knows!" he growled with a sudden burst of fury, "I have begged enough from these labouring swine. Had I known you were what you are my conduct had been more civil, but I was famishing, famishing in Merry England, Merry England!" and he threw back his head and laughed bitterly. Then he motioned me towards the porch, and a moment later I again faced him, but with nothing between us.

"Lead the way, sir," said he, and, determined to show no sign of fear, I slipped past him and entered my own room, still clutching the unlighted candle, and with my feet sopping wet. He followed me in and shut the door, affording me an excellent opportunity to seize him by the nape of the neck had I so wished. Instead, I made for the fire and threw myself into my chair.

He came and stood again with his back to the logs, and I surveyed him to better advantage. The man was a scarecrow. His hair was coarse and of a reddish tint, his coat a dingy blue, frayed at the cuffs, and with the tails cut off. His breeches, of some sad yellow colour, were very wide, patched in a dozen places, and fastened below the knees with faded ribbons of puce, which formed a knot of ends and tags where they were tied. The skin of his lean shanks peeped through his stockings, which had once been green, and his miserable shoes were void of buckles and worn away at the heels. Such a tatterdemalion I had never seen, but the man looked hardy. He was of great breadth, too broad for his height, and his chest was both deep and long. His legs, though thin, were bowed in a way I have often noticed makes for strength in certain frames. Still, looking at him critically, I felt convinced I could master him in a fair tussle, for I was no chicken, and not yet over thirty, while this sea dog was

The Man in the Snow

21

a man who would never see fifty winters. The thought put another idea in my head.

"Your bargain, captain," said I, giving him the first title that came into my mind, "was a little weak in one particular."

"Indeed," he answered with a droll smile, "and that is?"

"You did not stipulate as to your own safety."

"Why, no, doctor," he said in a strangely dreamy voice, "why, no; you see"—he stopped and seemed confused—"you see," he went on, "I have been accustomed to look," he spoke with difficulty, "to look after myself," and having so said his eyes grew fixed and lost all expression, he tilted on to his toes, and before I could catch him pitched forward upon the floor, narrowly missing the table-edge with his forehead as he fell.

CHAPTER II

CORKRAN THE COXSWAIN

As I have hinted, I sprang to his aid, but was too late to prevent him thudding on a dog-skin which covered the floor boards close to where he had been standing. What had foiled me in the effort was the suddenness of his collapse, but what kept me from at once kneeling beside him and feeling for his heart-beat was a very horrible thing which happened as he struck the planking and the mat—his whole head of hair fell away from his skull! That alone would have been nothing. It was plain to me at once that the reddish mop was but a counterfeit, a remarkably well-made wig, but what kept me rigid and motionless was the astounding fact, believe it or not as you will, that the man had no scalp! It was in very truth his skull with which the hairy mass had parted company. Still, the bones were covered, shrouded by the remnants of the integuments, which were like a tightly-stretched piece of dark and mottled parchment. Upon the skin were little eminences, for what had been the veins and other vessels were now dried and bunched and withered into fibrous cords, for all the world like the castings of sea-worms upon smooth sea sand. I had become accustomed to many gruesome scenes, but I confess the sight of that head shocked me, coming as it did after the remarkable episodes of a remarkable half-hour.

I recovered quickly, and was moved to pity and admiration at one and the same time. If the man had looked shabby from the front, he looked even shabbier now that he lay prone, and the wretched attempts to preserve decency, ay, and cohesion, in his

no other garments were disclosed in full. It was clear to me why his coat tails had vanished—they had gone to the patching of his breeches. His plight stirred me to compassion, but the bold front he put upon his misery, the cavaliering way he had usurped my hearthstone, the reckless courage of the man who had borne himself like a swaggering bravo when he must have felt this fainting fit, if, indeed, it was not death itself, stealing upon him, excited my admiration. Yet only for a moment. I thought upon the empty tankard, I remembered that his eyes had glittered like the bauble in his beard, and then it seemed very plain to me that much of his bravado was due to my strong, hot ale swilled upon an empty stomach. Still, to give him due credit, his performances had begun with the swigging of my drink and the smoking of my pipe, both singularly impertinent actions, and curiously enough, very far removed from the gentlemanly behaviour he had exhibited when, to my mind, under the influence of liquor.

However that might be, there he lay, and it was my duty as a man, to say nothing of my leechship, to see what could be done for him.

I knelt by his side, but did not turn him upon his back, for if his heart still beat, its tapping between his ribs was best discovered in his present position. I therefore thrust my hand beneath him, slid it within the flaps of his coat, and applied my palm to the præcordia. For a moment I felt no impact, and was for looking at his pupils and getting a glass to his lips, but presently there came a fluttering under my fingers, and I found the apex beat in a rib interspace. I tested his pulse, and it was present, though very feeble. The vital spark was not yet quenched, the man was merely in a swoon.

I had the curiosity to examine his head hurriedly. A knife, swept neatly from occiput to occiput, had no doubt severed the ghastly trophy; indeed, a few grey hairs adhered to what was left and told me his beard was not, like his top thatch, a counterfeit. Rising, I crossed hastily to my cupboard and poured out a tass of brandy, and into it I dropped a few minims of the strong Dutch tincture of asafœtida, the which I opine has a smell sufficient to bring back most folk from the confines of the grave. I

got him on his back, supported him, and had infinite difficulty in forcing the dose down his gullet, but with patience I succeeded. The effect was not slow in making itself felt. Then—and I recall this with some pleasure—I had the delicacy to replace his wig, which made an extraordinary difference to his visage. The man coughed and spluttered as the last drops trickled over his tongue, his eyelids flickered, and he heaved a sigh which was half a groan. I pressed upon the ridge above his eye, close to the root of his nose, and the stimulus did good. He raised his arm as if to defend himself.

"Come, captain!" I cried, rejoiced to find my efforts meeting with response, "an old tarpaulin like you is not going to slip his cable this fashion. Yo, ho, ho!" I shouted, remembering the burden of his song.

"Yo, ho, ho!" he answered dreamily. "Dowse the light; dowse the light!"

It was clear his senses were returning—he could both speak and see.

"There's a man!" said I, shaking him; "there's a jolly Rodger! Rouse up, skipper; it's eight bells."

I had not the most vague idea what such nonsense meant, but it seemed pat and fitting for the occasion.

"Tumble up!" he grunted; "tumble up!" and then suddenly, "Pipe, ye devil; ye swab of a sea-cook, pipe all hands, all hands!"

The last words came in a sing-song drawl, as though he were chanting an anthem. Beyond all manner of doubt, he was the most interesting patient I had yet encountered.

"Humph!" thought I, "had I a few more of this kind in place of fluxes, rheums, and apoplexies, I would rest content," and again I called upon him.

This time he sat bolt upright, and began staring about him.

"You're safe, captain," said I; "come to moorings."

"Moorings!" quoth he, still in a dazed way; "no moorings for me this side of hell port with the flukes grappling a gridiron."

Yo, ho, ho!
Let the old hulk go,
Barnacles up and bows below."

He was singing again in a silly, drunken fashion, and I perceived there was yet more of this sea-ditty of his.

"Avast!" I cried, my last word of sea-lore in those days, and he looked up at me and winked most cunningly with one of his black eyes. I laughed outright, so curious was his expression.

"Hee, hee!" said he, bent on mimicry, and started hiccoughing till I thought he would choke. He was either boozy as an owl, or maudlin from sheer weakness.

"Can you eat, think you?" I asked him.

"Eat?" said he, and again the wolfish look came into his eyes. "'Tis so long since I tried that I cannot tell," and presently a big salt tear gathered on each underlid and went coursing down into the wan hollows of his cheeks. God knows! I had a most unwonted dampness in my own eyes at the sight.

I propped him up with his back against a chair, and went in search of provender. There was need of care, for let a famished man gorge and 'tis his last meal. I bethought me of the solar plexus of this ancient mariner, and what the effects of pressure thereupon would be; consequently I merely made him a panada of broken bread soaked in hot water, and with a modicum of the brandy sprinkled over it. Then I set to work and fed him with a spoon. He was eager—keen as a young pigeon for its mother's beak, as a babe for the breast, and I had a great ado to check his voracity. At first he swallowed with difficulty, but by degrees he gained power and control, and his relish was a thing worth witnessing. A thought struck me. I would get him a raw egg, than which there is nothing more sustaining and easy of digestion. I placed the pap upon the table and again sought the cupboard. When I turned, egg in hand, there was my patient crawling towards the food. He saw me, and stopped shamefaced; then he grunted sullenly and went back to his chair. For all that I gave him the egg, and it revived him mightily.

"Shiver me!" said he, when he had done swallowing, and his speech now was that of the man he looked. "Where am I, master?"

"You are safe," I answered; "no more snow for you this night."

"Snow!" said he. "Ay, ay, I do remember; curse it!" and he spat into the fire.

"Dost recollect singing without the window?" I asked.

"Surely, now."

"And the trick you played me?"

"Trick; stap me! What trick? No, no, my cock; I went asleep in the snow, curse it!"

"If you had," said I, "it would have been your last."

"Very like, young master, and a good riddance."

"Do you tell me," said I, "that you do not remember swaggering in here, and pouching my ale, and making free with my weed?"

"My eye!" he exclaimed, "and what's the damage? Out with it, and if doubloons will pay it, I'm your man. 'Corkran,' said the skipper to me, 'pay your way, Corkran,' said he, 'whatever tack you're on; pay it in money or pay it in blood, but pay it, Corkran,' said he to me, 'and be hanged to ye!'"

He chuckled at this precious sentiment till he hiccupped again. As for me I was amazed. The gentleman in him was gone; once more he was the coarse sea-dog, who had snapped my pipe-stem and ruffled it like a pirate. For all that I could see he was worried, was annoyed at finding he had said and done things of which he had no recollection. I could fancy him wondering what secret he had let drop, what I knew regarding him; and yet all I did know was that he had seen better days, had no scalp, wore no shirt next his skin, and that his coat tails formed the seat of his breeches.

"Well, Captain Corkran," said I, paying no attention to his quaint offers to refund me, "have you your sea-legs again, think you?"

"Stow it, you lubber!" was his reply. "You would talk like a salt, and yet you can't even sniff it in these parts. What do you know about the sea and ships, and sea-legs and lubber holes, and the green heave and the scuppers awash?—what do you know, tell me that?"

As he spoke he clambered up on his feet by the aid of the chair handle, but he swayed when erect and was fain to sink back upon the padding.

"I be hopelessly weak," he said faintly.

"Here!" said I, no whit out of humour at his crustiness, and I gave him more of the bread and brandy pap.

"You're a straight one," he growled; "no shark or crimp about you, and all for a poor sailor man. Gad! what was the whine? 'An alms for the love o' Christ and of your charity.'

"Tut, man!" said I, "was I to see you starve?"

"Ecod! your precious mates in this village would have let the ravens pick me clean or ever they shifted in their bunks, and yet methinks my song may have tickled them. Picture," said he, "down the lum comes the wind and my chantey with it; and do you see them shivering at the words? It's the devil, say they, and drag the sheets up, and yet do not shiver like the devil with a rag on his back and half his coat in his breeches. Yo, ho, ho, sing I, and oh! oh! oh! sing they, and the bairns run to their mother, and all because of Corkran the Coxswain."

"Corkran the Coxswain," I repeated.

"Ay; or, if you like," he said with a sudden petulance, speaking as he had done at the first, "Corkran the captain, or the cabin boy, or the canting chaplain. Body o' me! but they were for making me a chaplain once, a chaplain, no less!"

He staggered up and made me a bow, then sat back, curled himself up, and presently went to sleep.

It had wanted, perchance, an hour of midnight when this strange being who now dozed in my chair had startled me with his song. I took the watch, which had been my father's, from my fob, and made out the time to be close on twelve, nigh the eeriest part of the night, and here was I sitting opposite my latest patient and the candle guttering in the socket. I relit the other, and fell to conning over the events of the past hour, the while I scanned the huddled form before me.

Several things were, to me, inexplicable: the strength of the man's singing when out of doors, his changes in demeanour, though there I had a clue, his speedy recovery, and the ease with which he had composed himself to rest, for all the world like an infant.

I had yet to learn the ups and downs of an ocean life, to

understand that a man worn out, who has oft pricked for the softest plank, snoozes when and how he may, and, more, I was to appreciate to the full the grim courage and grit of this mangled piece of flotsam.

Meanwhile I watched him, noted his heavy breathing, placed a log very gently on its charred fellows so as not to rouse him, and was, I think, a little touched by his confidence in myself. For all he knew I might have him up before Squire Pumphret as a vagabond, have him clapped in the stocks, and, after having fed him with a raw but fresh-laid egg, have him pelted by rustics with eggs, raw indeed, but of a disgusting rottenness, and to which, as regards smell, the odour of the drug I had given him was as the scent of new-mown hay.

I sat and stared at him, I say, and clean forgot all about my damp and chilly feet till there came a loud knocking on the outer door and the voice of a man calling, "Doctor Mortimer, Doctor Mortimer!"

It was like the fool, for I knew the squire's voice at once, and here he was hammering on the oak and bawling my name while the least grain of sense would have set him tapping quietly at the lighted window.

I rose with a rueful countenance, I fear, and for the second time let in the night air, but not before I had drawn the hangings at the casement and made up my mind that the squire was not to enter and see what company I kept. It was enough to ruin me in the parish were I discovered with such a mass of rags at such an hour.

The squire was deep in liquor. He loved his wife, and his method of killing his grief at her illness was to soss and sip till he was fuddled, and his brain, such as it was, blunted. As ever, he was impatient, had trudged all the way himself, and, being partly sobered, was in a very vile temper.

His greeting was curt, and he upbraided me for not having spent the night with him.

"I told you," said he, "that my wife would grow worse, but you must have your own way and bring me through all this filth to fetch you."

It was in vain I told him there were others who had need of my services, that I had not reached home till ten of the clock, that no purpose would have been served by my remaining. He lost his manners, and called me a lazy hound.

"Look you, sir," said I, "were it not that your wife is my patient and that you are drunk, I would be hanged sooner than go a step with you."

"Is that your tune?" he cried. "Let me tell you, young man, I have a nephew of your profession who will quickly make short work of you and your airs."

"Then fetch him!" said I, and made as though to shut the door in his face.

That scared him, as I knew it would, for his precious nephew of whom I had heard overmuch for my liking, was away in London, and had indeed just obtained his letters, being a stripling who knew no more than he had learned from books and prosy teachers. The squire therefore ate humble pie, and eventually I got me into my cloak and boots and set out with him, though he was in high dudgeon,—chiefly, I think, because I left him to kick his heels in the porch and did not offer him a hot drink.

I had many qualms about leaving Corkran in possession, but I trusted that my absence would be brief and that he would sleep soundly till my return. Consequently I clapped the extinguisher on both candles, but locked the outer door and took the key with me, somewhat to old Pumphret's surprise, for such was not my usual habit, and to him there would appear little chance of any strolling tramp being abroad on such a night. The cold and dreary trudge to the Hall put me once more into an ill-humour with life, but, as ever, I settled to my work when I was at my patient's bedside. The squire's wife was worse, much worse. Frankly, I did not know what was the matter with her, but something more than any ague of the fens had supervened. Her malady was acute, her symptoms would have been alarming even to the untrained eye.

"When in doubt, bleed," I hold to be an excellent maxim, and consequently acted upon it, but in vain. Her breathlessness increased, her lips became blue, her breathing of extreme rapidity.

Having bled, I cupped her; having cupped her, I applied a cataplasm of mustard, and many other things I tried, which there is no need to recount. In short, I did my best, and what more can a man, even a physician, do? The good dame's days were numbered, and presently all was over, with the big squire blubbering like a babe and myself much distressed. I did my best to console him, but he was exceedingly ungracious, and eventually took to the bottle, paying me in my own coin by never pressing a glass on me, and half hinting that my carelessness had brought about his wife's death. So it too often is with men of my profession—more kicks than thanks, more rebuffs than remittances, though it is true that when there is gratitude it is not stinted.

The winter's day was in process of birth as I quitted the spot where death had vanquished me and my patient, as he must vanquish all one day or other, however his sting may be felt. Very dreary was the landscape, the trees bare and ghostly, the vast level plain white and silent, the sky murky and streaked by lines of cold light in the east.

I had seen such mornings after other births, ay, and after other deaths; for it is as night changes to day, in the still small hours, that most souls pass to meet their Maker. Never had I faced the scene so disconsolately; for when all was said and done it meant a great deal to have the squire's favour, and I had lost a good patient, and, therefore, a good friend.

So absorbed was I in my gloomy thoughts that I forgot my old man of the seas till I came within sight of my own snug cottage. Then I recalled him fast enough, for the room was lighted. I entered hastily, tapping the snow crusts from my soles, and wondering what the next move of my remarkable visitor would be. A glance showed me he was awake, very much awake indeed, and very much at home. While locking the door, I had neglected to lock the cupboard in which, as ill-luck would have it, there had been stored a square stone jar of strong waters. It was easy to see where these latter were now stored. Corkran had heaped on logs till the flames leaped and roared up the chimney, and he was seated straight before the blaze, his heels upon the mantelshelf, his body roasting, and a tall glass convenient at his

elbow. It was plain that he was warming himself most effectually, both inside and out. He apparently did not hear me enter, and I grew savage at the sight of him. Just as he raised the glass, I came behind him softly and dragged the chair towards me. Down clattered his heels on the hearth, but he saved himself a fall by clutching at the chair arms, though in doing so he let go the glass, and spilt its contents all over his nether garments.

Next moment he was on his feet, and the next I looked straight into the bell-mouth of a pistol! But I was not to be daunted—I had dealt with drunken men before. Humour them or bully them; there are no other methods of managing fuddled and heated brains. In this case I took the latter course. I stepped back quickly, keeping my eyes on his, and then suddenly I kicked upwards, catching the pistol full with my heavy boot upon its barrel, and sending the weapon flying from his grasp. It struck the wall and fell upon the floor, but did not explode; yet it had scarcely left his hand when I was at close quarters, though I did not offer to molest him. He glared at me a moment, and then threw back his head and laughed.

"By old Daddy Neptune!" said he, "but that is a trick worth knowing; clever, oh, cursedly clever, and yet a waste of energy, Doctor Harry! Observe, the barker does not bark. The assumption, therefore, is?"

He was actually questioning me, and once more had all the demeanour of a gentleman, from which I gathered he was exceeding drunk.

"It was not loaded, you say, at least your face says so—a person of discernment, a doctor excellent at the diagnosis; and the prognosis, sir; what of the prognosis?"

He cocked his head to one side like a pert bird.

"The terrors for you, sir," I answered, "unless you——"

"The terrors! Good Lord! But there is a jest, a rum puncheon with the terrors! Split me! and thou art not a quack, Doctor Harry? The terrors! but you did not flinch at the empty barrel. Let's see what you say to this!" With that, before I had the least inkling of his design, he whipped off his wig and displayed his scalpless head. Had I not seen it before I

make no doubt but that I would have started back and cried out in horror, for if revolting in a man unconscious, the parchment-like vault with the dull red encircling line, and the knots and cords upon it, was little else than appalling as it surmounted the haggard, wizened face of the man. His eyes gleamed in a merry madness above his bird's beak of a nose, his thin lips grinned in expectancy, and he kept thrusting forward his hooked chin, from which depended his bunch of grey beard, in which, as before, the bauble glittered in the candlelight. As it was I could look upon the head unmoved, and I did so.

"Most interesting," said I. "Captain Corkran, we must of a surety have you in a peep-show!"

Never had a simple sentence a more speedy effect. The light died out from his face; he became confused and abashed. There was something pathetic in the way he clapped his wig back upon his skull, and he stared at me with an expression half of awe, half of admiration.

"Fore God!" he mumbled, "it hath never failed me heretofore," and with that he reeled and staggered back to his chair.

"Come, captain," said I, with a feeling of pity for him, "that also is a trick worth knowing, but it is useless to try it on a chirurgeon, who in his schooling days has whipped off both scalp and skull."

"Ay," said he dourly, "and is that so, man?"

He bit his lips and sat silent. Presently, however, the drink began to work in him again.

"My scalp," said he, "or rather, my lack of it, is my fortune. Good luck go with the painted fiend who carries it at his girdle!"

"You lost it in battle?" I hazarded, dragging off my boots.

"You may say so," said he; "in battle with the red savage, who battles like a beast. Bush battle, my lad; a shot from behind a tree, or a silent leap from a thicket."

"In the Americas?" I queried.

"Even there, O great geographer!" said he. "Know you the Potomac and the swamps? But no—a home-bird, a home-bird!"

He spoke with an air of infinite disdain, waving his hand the while.

"Indeed," said I, stripping off my cloak, "I have in my time crossed the narrow seas to Holland."

"To Holland!" he almost shouted; "man, do you speak the Dutch?"

"I can make very fair shift in that tongue," said I.

"It is a miracle," he muttered; "a fair miracle, the book and the Dutch—yet they say there is no God!"

"What?" I asked, for I could make nothing of his meaning.

He started as from a reverie, and began searching in the pockets of his breeches. Presently he produced a little round ball of some brown stuff, which I judged to be sticky from the way it clung to his finger-tips.

"Look you, my Doctor Harry," said he, paying no attention to my question, "without this I had been dead long since; this is food and drink, it is a warm fire, it is the future, it is life, man, I tell you, life itself." He put it to his nostrils: "For all that," he went on, "you men of pill and potion know nothing of its virtues, you poor islanders with your vile drugs; but, bless you! it is a feast in miniature."

He bit at the mess, and shoved it back into his pocket.

"Stap me!" said he, chewing as he spoke; "but it is near done, and when it is finished, what am I to do then?"

"Do," I answered, bewildered at his remarks; "it does not seem to have done much for you."

"And yet," he answered, "it kept me living for a week; but, mark you, it is poison on an empty stomach. Give me one meal in three days, and I will live like a lord; but I am a liar if I had eaten aught for a week ere I staggered to your window."

Now, I was certain he was a liar, without any such proviso; but I said nothing, having, indeed, no need, for the drug, if drug it was, had already begun to exercise its potent power upon him, and he chattered like a jay. Never had I heard such a talker or such a theme.

He spoke of the foulest piracy, of the most terrible of storms; he described the most wondrous lands and the strangest animals; he dilated on the vilest men of whom I had ever heard, and told

me tales of women who, from his account, must have been of a most ravishing loveliness.

His eyes danced in his head, he shot out his prodigiously long arms hither and thither, every muscle fibre in his lean face worked and quivered, and a dew of sweat broke out upon his skin.

At one moment he was sitting by a camp fire in the wilds of a forest, and from the deep blackness a multitude of green eyes were glaring at him, the next he was astride a hencoop and battling with a hideous cuttle-fish. In a trice he would pass from a tale of treasure to the eating of a stowaway by rats, from an adventure with a monstrous snake to the catching of sea birds and the clubbing of seals, for he had sailed in the frozen latitudes. Heaven knows my head swam with the number and variety of his recountings. I sat and listened, spellbound. This man had lived, and I—I had stagnated.

"What think you?" he cried at last; "when you are my age, what will you have done, Doctor Henry Mortimer? Ridden a few leagues, walked a few leagues, sweated a few leagues, poisoned a few poor devils, helped a few more into this good old world and a few more out of it, though they be lucky, pocketed a few guineas and spent a deal of them. You will have grown fat and taken a maid to wife, and skelped her brats, and seen to their schooling, and looked out all the time on what? Stap my vitals! On this accursed, dreary country, and on tongues with half an inch fur on them. Body o' me! and this is life, you say. Mayhap 'tis for a clod or a weakling, but for a strong man and a young man, and a man whose blood runs free! No, no, my Doctor Harry, you have done Nicholas Corkran a good turn, and may he rot if he does not requite you in like measure! Would you have the yellow boys? Trust old Nick. Would you jingle the rix-dollars? Then slip your cable and set sail with me, my lad! Would you see the sun all day and the stars all night? Come with Nick, my hearty. Would you eat luscious fruit and drink the ruddy wine? would you live, man, and set your blood a-dancing, and know that you may die ere night and yet have lived right royally for once ere ever you be snuffed like the candle there?"

He lurched upon his feet and quenched the burning wick,

though I could have sworn no man could have reached it from the spot where he stood. On his bowed legs glowed the light from the logs; on his face was the grey shadow of the dawn. Whenever I think of that morn I think of Corkran thus, and smell the smell of hot tallow; ay, and I recall what followed, for all at once he craned his head forward till the cartilage of his throat showed like the Adam's apple it is called, till it quivered in motion, till there came that jerking, harsh note in his throat I had learned to know; and then, for I sat still like one fascinated, he broke into his wild sea-song, line after line, verse after verse, beating the time with one skinny forefinger, and filling the room with the volume of his voice.

Sing hey! for a voyage to the sunny Cape,
For a pouch full of gold and the juice of the grape,
For the rippling beach where the mermaids call,
For the yellow sands where the turtles crawl.

Yo, ho, ho!

Let the good ship go,
Bunting above and bilge below.

Sing hey! for the parrots green and red,
For the bright sea-snake with the purple head,
For the sinking sun, like a ruddy ball,
For the roar of the typhoon and the squall.

Yo, ho, ho!

Let the good ship go,
Crowded aloft and tight below.

Sing hey! for the burst of the sounding sea,
For the blind look-out on the high cross-tree,
For the heaving bow and the tossing stern,
For the fear of death that the sailors learn.

Yo, ho, ho!

Let the old tub go,
Riven above and rent below.

Sing hey! for the crash on the coral reef,
For the joy of the shark and the skipper's grief,
For the heaving clank of the red pump chain,
For the gush of the bilge and the green sea rain.

Yo, ho, ho!

Let the old hulk go,
Barnacles up and bows below.

The Golden Kingdom

Sing hey! for the days in the open boat,
For the sun's fierce glare and the thirsty throat,
For the oar's long creak and the broken rest,
And the fin of the shark on his ceaseless quest.

Yo, ho, ho!

Let the jolly boat go,

Dead men above and sharks below.

Sing hey! for the grin on the dead man's face,
For the slicing knife and the lean carcāse,
For the bird with the beak and the last man left,
For the stranded boat and the shark bereft.

Yo, ho, ho!

Let the dead men go

To Davy Jones who' waits below.

Sing hey! for the lad on the lonely isle,
For the signal flag and the firing pile,
For the knife-notched stick and the sail at last,
For the lass at home and the perils past.

Yo, ho, ho!

Let the mariner go,

For it's Jack that can tell what the sea doth show,

Yo, ho, ho!

Let the merry man go,

Fuddled above and primed below.

CHAPTER III

THE EVIL EYE

HE had finished, and was back into his chair, a limp and inert heap of old clothes ere I came to myself. All the time he sang I sat watching and listening, wholly spellbound by his weirdness, and also, in some measure, by the magnificence of his voice. True, it grated like sand between the teeth as each verse started, but once into the swing of the song, it rose full and true, with a roll as of sea-billows in it, and something liquid in its notes, as though it issued from the belly of incurving waves. Laugh at this my description if you will. I trow you have never heard Corkran the Coxswain singing the song of his own making, or you would be hard put to it to find words wherewith to picture the strangeness of his melody. He was fairly beside himself as he neared the finish. To the rush of the tune he swung his body, to the trip of the words he waved his arms, and all the time the thyroid cartilage shielding his windpipe shot up and down, like the plug of a pump-piston.

You have seen a bird, a pretty warbler on a bough—a robin redbreast, if you will—stretching his ruffled throat as he piped merrily, and you may have marked the vibratings of his syrinx or song-box as the tremulous notes issued from out his beak; so was it with the sea-dog; only there was nothing pretty about him, and his notes poured from between his narrow, colourless lips, and not from that great beak of his, the nostrils of which quivered as he breathed. But he was done at last; and slowly I began to realise where I was, and that it was now

daylight, and, worse than all, that half the village was at the window.

The hangings had fallen aside, or, perhaps, for I had paid no attention to such a trivial matter on my return—or, perhaps, I say, Corkran, in his drunkenness, had been gazing out upon the village street ere I entered. However that may be, he had gathered his audience, and what first drew my attention to them was, I think, the red hood worn by one of the women. Indeed, it seemed somehow to have got mixed up with the words of the song ; and whether or not it was the idea of the red parrot, or the horrid gape from the slicing knife, that hood was at first merely a crimson spot dancing before my eyes, till, all of a sudden, it became motionless, took shape, and I saw it as it really was.

There were the villagers, close upon a score of them, four deep outside the window, their mouths open with astonishment, their eyes almost bulging from their sockets. To many of them, as I even then reflected, this would be the event of their lives—ay, and of my life also—for, like a flash, I remembered that the squire's wife was dead.

Here was I, on whom these folk depended in times of sickness and death far more than they did on their God or the vicar—here was I, new come from a death-scene, and discovered with a drunken mariner in my house—a bloody pirate to all appearance, clad in rags, of an extraordinary countenance, and bawling—nay, I crave his pardon—singing, at an unearthly hour, such a song as had never before been heard within a dozen miles of Bishop-Solingford. It was enough to ruin me, enough to condemn me for ever in the place ; and that nothing might be lacking in the case against me, I recalled the fact that it was the Sabbath Day.

What would the vicar say? That mattered little. What would the squire say? That mattered much. What was I to say? That mattered most of all. I must act quickly, for already the throng was increasing, was being augmented by new-comers—some only half-clad, despite the cold—so great was the interest that had been aroused, so surprising the thing that was happening, had happened, was about to happen (Heaven knows what rumours were afloat !) in the house of Doctor Henry Mortimer.

Now that the voice which had attracted them was silent, they had begun to talk amongst themselves, those in front telling those behind what they had seen, all discussing the matter, questioning and being questioned, till the hum of their converse came to me through the panes, against which one inquisitive fellow was pressing his ugly mug.

I sprang to my feet, on which he beat a hasty retreat, and, crossing the room, I threw open the casement.

A murmur went up from the people.

"It's the doctor himself, God bless him!" "Be quiet, you donnered vule! let's hark to him," and such-like phrases.

"Good folk," said I, resolved to take the bull by the horns, "it is not seemly you should stand and gossip thus. The squire's poor lady died this very morning; indeed, I am but new come from her bedside."

At my words a fresh murmur of voices arose, and one fool of a woman shrieked, while others fell a-whimpering. Mistress Pumphret had been a good friend to many of them, being as kindly and charitable a soul as ever set face within a cottage door.

Suddenly, however, the shrill voice of a certain sour and ill-conditioned fellow, who acted as drawer at the Green Frog was raised above the others.

"But who bees the singer, Maister Mortimer—who be he, now? Tell us that."

"Ay, who be he?" chorused half a dozen of them.

"I would I knew," I answered mysteriously. "All I can say is that he is a famished man whose brain is turned by his sufferings, and whom I have been trying this past hour to recover from his fits. He is quiet now; but it has been an ill task, and a scandal besides, that he should bring you trooping to my window Sabbath morn, and the lady at the Hall not yet cold."

It was a sight to see their upturned faces. They were full of doubt and suspicion, and only half-satisfied.

"Whoi, so it be, Soonday it is, and us out o' bed, and Mistress Pumphret be still waarm."

Scratching their dense heads, or in some other manner evincing they were puzzled and perplexed, they began to scatter

and go, all except the fellow I have mentioned, Abel Pike by name, who coolly forced his way to the front, peered into the room under my very nose, and then turned to me, with a grimy finger clapped to his greasy nose.

"All my eye, Maister Mortimer," said he; "and you a-sittin' hearkening to the cap'n there. I do allow, now, as how he bees a Papist. I seed a trinket in his beard-tag—a scapular, belike—and he was in there or ever you went up to th' Hall—that he were, sure's I'm Abel Pike."

"Is that so, Abel?" said I, knowing the man disliked me for having told him my mind anent the way he illtreated his wife and starved his children. Not that he was a rogue, for he had no spirit in him, save what he drank; but he was a shiftless, petty, interfering sneak, and a thorn in the vicar's flesh.

"Ay, that be so, Maister," he answered with a leer in his eye.

"You are a clever rascal, Abel," said I, "to know so much; but if you would not know how a cuffed head feels on a Sabbath morning you had better be gone, and, harkee, give that tongue of yours a rest, else I may have occasion to slit it with a lancet."

"Moi tongue!" he replied. "Look you, Maister, he who slits the starling's tongue makes him speak, and he who says he'll slit Abel Pike's, whoi, he do the same."

With that he thrust out the organ in question at me with a most impudent air and shambled off towards the inn, leaving me with the uncomfortable feeling that I had not triumphed in this encounter and that trouble loomed ahead.

I closed the window and turned to the unconscious figure in the chair, noting even then, for it is strange how little things fix themselves in our brains, remarking, I repeat, the contrast the russet hair of his wig made with the deep red padding against which it rested.

I approached my old man of the sea and found him in a kind of stupor from which it was impossible to rouse him. Consequently I thought the best thing to do was to bundle him to bed. Fortunately there was a little chamber at the back of the cottage wherein was a bed set in the recess of the wall. It was a very tiny room with a small window near the roof and a

The Evil Eye

41

door with a keyhole in it. Thither I conveyed the bag of bones, finding him very light, for all his bulk of chest and breadth of shoulder, and I bestowed him, clothes and all, in the bed and covered him up to the chin. Then I locked the door upon him and waited impatiently for the coming of Dame Pottinger and the cooking of my breakfast. Now that I had leisure to think, I became aware of the fact that I was very hungry. Presently the old crone came in as usual, after I had put the other room in order, and I soon found that she had not an inkling of the events of the night. Indeed, she was as deaf as a gargoyle, and apparently none of the villagers had taken the trouble to acquaint her with the fact that the modest dwelling which she kept clean and tidy harboured a most peculiar visitor.

I made her understand, however, that I had a guest who was on no account to be disturbed, and impressed on her the importance of refusing admittance to any one who might call to see me ; then, having stowed away a comfortable meal, I betook me to the vicarage after looking in on my grey mare, which was stabled hard by, and was in charge of a very decent one-legged fellow, who saw to her feeding and bedding and grooming, and carried messages and medicines for me. He was silent and taciturn—good qualities in a servant, and if he had heard aught showed no sign of it, being busy tossing the straw of the stall when I entered and when I left the stabling shed. The vicar, on the other hand, was all agog with the news and athirst for information, despite the fact that it was the first day of the week. He was very dependent on me for reasons afore mentioned, having no trust in what he termed unskilled labour, but apart from that was a cheery, well-conditioned man, on excellent terms with himself and his neighbours. His girth and rubicosity necessitated his temper being placid, for the least display of spleen would have landed him in an apoplexy. Of an engaging plumpness, with bulging cheeks and calves, a merry eye, deep set in fat, and a well-controlled love of the bottle, the Reverend Hilary Spetticue was to my mind an ideal country parson, whose spouse was as amiable as himself, and was indefatigable in presenting him with pledges of affection.

"Come your ways in, doctor," said he to me. "What mystery is this? Since ever I rolled out from between the sheets and got me into small clothes my ears have been dinned with gossip. If I have said *mirabile dictu* once, I have said it a dozen times, but, dear me, is it true that the squire's lady is no more?"

I nodded curtly, and he lamented her decease for full five minutes.

"Well, well," he exclaimed at length, "we must all go one day! but she has scarce fulfilled her mission. The poor dame was not a fruitful vine, like my Amelia.

A woman should both be a wife and a mother,
Dame Pumphret was only the one, not the other.

There's a couplet for you, doctor," and so he rambled on, as was his way, watching me all the time with his shrewd, brown, twinkling eyes and complacently stroking his smooth and ruddy cheeks. Presently he reverted to the subject which had first occupied his thoughts.

"For any sake tell me the truth, doctor," said he; "I have heard so many stories that I can neither make head nor tail of what has happened. One informs me that you are sheltering a Popish refugee, another that a murderer has sought your hospitality, while not a few have it that the devil himself has found refuge under your thatch."

"Well," I answered, "you may take it the last is nearest the truth," and thereupon I told him the tale, at least as much of it as was good for him to know.

"Harkee, Mr. Spetticue," said I, "it is an ugly business, coming as it does on the top of Dame Pumphret's decease. The man is utterly unlike anything these clods have seen or imagined, and will be to them what a red rag is to a bull. For all that, I have given him food and shelter, and under my roof-tree he bides till he is strong enough to go elsewhere."

"Is it wise, doctor?" replied the vicar, an easy-going man, who hated strife and trouble and shied at difficulties as a timid horse shies at a stiff hedge.

"Wise or not, it is at least humane," I urged. "Am I to hear one of your cloth advising me to turn this poor wretch adrift, whatever his sins may have been? If so, then as I live, I count him more man than yourself."

I spoke irritably, having had no sleep, and I scared the worthy parson.

"No, no, you mistake me; but after what the squire said of his nephew——"

"The deuce take his nephew!" I answered; "surely I can stand on my own feet—Heaven knows they are large enough! But this Corkran is half starved and wholly destitute,—indeed, he does not look as though he had long to live."

"His death would indeed be a happy deliverance," replied the vicar piously; "but such men live for ever, as the prophet Daniel said to King Darius. You are as stubborn as your worthy father before you, Harry my boy, and will bring a hornets' nest about your ears. But see, I will help you."

"In what way, sir?"

"Well, what say you to a sermon on the Good Samaritan? True, I had intended discoursing on Jonah this morning, but I have somewhere in the barrel an exposition dealing with the man who fell amongst thieves, and I will look it out and fit an application to it. Verily," he chuckled gleefully, "the idea is a good one."

"Humph!" I growled, none too gratefully, "I have no wish to figure publicly in that guise, and from the appearance of this sea-dog I should say a thief had fallen in on me. Certainly he pouched my ale and strong waters without so much as by your leave."

"Capital, my dear sir, capital! Did you not pour wine into his wounds?"

"Damme, sir, no! he poured my ale at a gulp into his stomach."

"Come, come, Harry, we must not follow the parable too closely, and such conduct on his part, though we will never mention it, makes your own behaviour all the more admirable. Leave it to me, and those who cursed will turn to blessing."

"So be it," I assented, "though I wish neither their curses nor

their blessings. If they but paid my fees, did my bidding, and let my private affairs alone, I would rest very well content."

"Would you, my lad? I doubt it hugely. Wer't ever impatient, a restless being, and too big for your boots, despite the size of your feet. Howbeit, I will do my best with the parishioners, though they seem to have got it into their heads that your mariner has the evil eye."

"The evil eye! Faith, he has two as evil orbs in his skull as ever glowed by candlelight. The next thing will be that he has bewitched me, and is the cause of Dame Pumphret's seizure and death."

"Very like, very like; we are full of superstitions, but meanwhile I will get Amelia to look out the Good Samaritan, and for your sake I will put myself in the very worst light. Not that I recall the rascal bellowing, for I was snug amongst the feathers an hour and more before he came trailing down the street, and so never heard him; still, I will liken myself to the priest, and the villagers to the Levite, the Hall will be Jerusalem, your own cottage Jericho, and——"

"Hold, hold!" said I, laughing at his eagerness, "my journey was done, and I was safely within the walls of Jericho or ever our friend whined for an alms out amongst the snow."

"Tut, tut, my dear lad! we must not trace the parable too minutely. Leave it to me, and come yourself and listen."

"Not I! Old Farmer Deane claims my attendance, and while you are perjuring yourself I must be in the saddle, despite the day and the drifts. A jolly life, Mr. Spetticue, a jolly life!"

"Out upon you, you rogue!" he cried. "I abandon a new and elegant theme and rake up my dusty parchments, and all the thanks I get is a talk of perjury and a grumble. Do your work, sir,—useful work, good work, God's work, sir, as He gives you strength," and with that the cheery parson thrust me forth, bidding me be of good cheer, and come to him if I wanted a bottle of sound Oporto for my latest patient.

Scarce had I gone a dozen steps, however, when he recalled me.

"Why," said he, "so intent was I on hearing your news that I clean forgot to give you mine."

"And what may that be?"

"Truly, I think the world is coming to an end, for in addition to your bony bone of contention, there is another stranger come to Bishop-Solingford."

"What!" I gasped, knowing from experience his way of putting things.

"Nay, nay, doctor, not so, though there be hopes in that direction, as you are aware; I merely mean that the forge has a new master, a blacksmith has come at last, and they tell me he is a Goliath of Gath, and of a peculiar complexion."

Now, though I have not mentioned it, having, indeed, had enough to recount heretofore, our village smithy had a history of its own, and that a tragic one, owing to the doings of Squire Pumphret's great black stallion. This horse was famous throughout twenty parishes, and the pride of the county, a huge brute, Lincolnshire bred, and of an enormous bulk and strength, massy in bone, and with a chest on which the vast muscles stood forth in two rounded mounds of solid flesh. I shall have more to tell of this beast; suffice it to say that every attempt to have it shod had failed.

It was the squire's whim to have badges of servitude nailed upon its hoofs, but the first smith who had undertaken the task was a cripple for life and a pensioner at the Hall, and the second had bespattered the smithy walls with his brains, and his family had been the special care of the squire's late wife. The horse had thus come to be looked upon with dread, and some had clamoured to have it shot; but Squire Pumphret said, "No," and his word was law. Consequently, the stallion went unshod, and the tales concerning it were many, and, in great part, exaggerated; but, what was worse, was that the squire would tolerate no smith who would not undertake the task on which his heart was set.

As a result, men came and men went, there being found none daring enough to master the animal to the extent of fitting him with shoes.

It was mightily inconvenient, for the work was intermittent, and it came hardest on me, who took more use out of horse flesh than any one else in the village. For a fortnight the smithy fire

had not blazed, nor the bellows been blown, nor hammer clanged on anvil, and there was much grumbling at the squire's folly and obstinacy. It had the effect, however, of increasing the fame of Hercules, as the horse was fitly named, and of giving Bishop-Solingford somewhat of a notoriety, if not, indeed, a distinction. Thus I was interested in the vicar's news.

"I fear," said I, "'twill be but a repetition of the old thing—a faint heart and a silent forge, and I do not wonder. The squire is mad, and the smiths are not, so——"

"Mayhap, mayhap," answered Mr. Spetticue gravely; "but they say this big, white-haired fellow, who, curiously enough, is called Jacob Little, has come from miles away for no other purpose than to pit his strength against the stallion's."

"Then," laughed I, "he is in the same condition as the squire; but he can start on my old mare, she needs shoeing badly, thanks to all this nonsense."

I was again about to depart, when I remembered I had forgotten to tell the vicar one portion of my tale and ask his advice, —namely, as to Corkran's interest in my book on fevers, his excitement on discovering I could speak Dutch, and his apparent deduction therefrom that there was a God. I put it to the worthy parson, but the riddle was beyond him.

"No doubt he has suffered from the swamp fever in foreign parts, and thinks you may be able to rid him of it," was all he could suggest, and so, no whit enlightened, I once again quitted his hospitable door.

I took my way slowly homewards, pondering deeply over the events of the night and the bearing they were likely to have upon my future; yet in that short walk down the village street something befell which added to my troubles—a trifling affair enough, but destined to be of some importance.

As I walked, staff in hand, through the slush I passed a crowd of children, and from amongst them a little maid came dancing merrily to meet me. I had a trick of carrying sweet stuffs about with me for my tiny patients, and so was on excellent terms with all the young folks, not a few of whom I had ushered into the world, while I had battled for the lives of others, being, though I

say it, somewhat skilled in the treatment of the infantile disorders, or perhaps having merely the knack of soothing a small sufferer and guessing at his complaint, and the sense to leave matters very much to old Dame Nature, the best physician of us all. Therefore, when this little maid came tripping over the snow I began to search my pockets for some toothsome morsel for her; but she halted some distance away and looked at me doubtfully, one finger at her cherry lips.

"What's the matter, Rosie?" I asked, recognising one of my chief favourites, a dainty maid with a merry chatter and a frank, engaging manner. She drew near me very slowly, and when I made pretence to catch her, screamed and fled from me. Growing bolder, however, she again approached, wonder and awe marked on her chubby Saxon countenance.

"Has he the evil eye?" she asked in a half whisper.

"He? whom do you mean?" I queried, knowing well enough.

"The bad man who lodges with you and sings wild songs."

"Come, come!" said I, "who put such nonsense in your pretty head, my lass?"

"It's not nonsense!" she answered stoutly. "Mother she does say he has cast a spell on you and killed the squire's lady."

"Pooh, pooh!" I replied, and poked my stick at her.

As ill-luck would have it, she slipped in trying to evade it, and fell on the snow, with one foot doubled up beneath her. She was more scared than hurt, and set up a lusty yelling, which brought her precious gossip of a mother hurrying from a cottage close at hand. The woman had seen me as she thought strike down the innocent child, and would on no account let me touch her, heaping me with reproaches, crying out in a shrill voice that there was a curse upon me, that the devil had me in his grip, and a string of similar follies.

It was in vain I strove to calm her, told her the thing was but an accident, offered to examine the ankle, and even appealed to the child. The irate woman was not to be mollified, and hurried off with her offspring to retail her woes to several other busy-bodies of her sex.

I was annoyed that such a fuss should be made about nothing at all, and worried to find also that, as the vicar had surmised, a superstitious horror of this Corkran had fastened upon some of the silly fools who had heard his performance. I scarce wondered at it, for I knew the temper of these folk, amongst whom much of my life had been passed, their prejudices and ignorance; while the man himself was certainly weird enough to raise grave doubts concerning him in the minds of simple country people, whose ideas of all that passed within six miles of them were of the vaguest.

Nor was this all. The child's companions seemed also to imagine that I was to blame for her fall, and persisted in following me down the street at a respectful distance and calling out names after me as though I had been a village natural. It was utterly ridiculous, but at the same time degrading, especially when one young rogue bolder than his fellows made a dash at my back and caught me neatly on the nape of the neck with a ball of snow which his plump fingers had kneaded.

I paid no attention beyond turning and shaking my fist at them, but the incident affected me unpleasantly.

"Familiarity," said I to myself, "breedeth contempt." I had done better to be as pompous as the vicar, who out of doors affected an air, strut, and gravity of demeanour ridiculous in my eyes, but most impressive to his humble flock. The snow melted and trickled down my back, causing me some slight discomfort, but apart from that I was for an instant pained to think that I, the village doctor, should suffer such an indignity at the hands of a child.

It was not mere fun—indeed, had it been so, I would have entered into the spirit of the thing, and, if need be, rolled my tormentors in the snow and paid them back in their own coin. No, their cries were jeers, their actions born of anger and suspicion, and what hurt me most of all, was the knowledge that the little rascal who had done me this despite was one with whom I had sat up with for two long weary nights when his body was racked with pain and the pertussis shook him like an ague fit.



The Evil Eye

49

A moment I thought thus, and then I dismissed this morbid, childish sensitiveness. "Good lack, Harry!" said I. "Surely the coxswain has bewitched you when you let a mere whim of a few infants distress you! Be a man! You grow pudding-headed in this dull hole."

With that I reached my own door, intent on seeing how my mariner fared ere I set out on my weary round of visits.

CHAPTER IV

THE BAUBLE IN THE BEARD

I ENTERED and found that he was much as I had left him, still sunk in a heavy stupor, his eyes closed so that I could see how wrinkled his lids were, his breathing heavy, almost stertorous, and his pulse weak and thready. It was hard to believe that such a man as this had ever been a smiling, crowing babe, had ever been dandled in a fond mother's arms, had, perhaps, been the joy and hope of a proud father. These were the thoughts which chased through my mind as I stood and looked at his mahogany visage, the crow's feet at the outer eye angles, the huge scar running from his temple to the smooth whitish patch, with, in its centre, the puckered skin guarding the entrance to the ear membrane. What a career he must have had, this tough old tarpaulin ! what sights he must have seen, what cries he must have heard, what horrors must he have encountered ! How hum-drum were the lives of most compared with that which Fortune had arranged for him ! And yet it seemed as though that life were drawing to an end, that strong flame, which had been blown this way and that by the gusts of adversity, appeared as though it were about to be quenched. A strange ending for an old salt, to die in a box-bed in the cottage of a village leech, miles from his ocean home ; to drag his anchor and drift silently into the unknown, a battered hulk with canvas in rags, and no doubt a very foul lading aboard of which to give account to the Great Supercargo whose reckoning he must face.

Well, it was my business to be his best bower anchor, to moor

him to the holding ground of good mother earth, to bring him up head to wind, and see if he could not even yet weather this storm in which he was like to founder. Food was what he wanted, food and stimulant and rest, and I vowed he should have all three, despite the squire and Abel Pike and all the blockheads in Bishop-Solingford.

I roused him sufficiently to get him to swallow some more of my panada, and then I stripped him, wondering at his leanness and the marks and tattooing on his hide, for he was a veritable picture-book.

I got him into a warm garment of linsey wool, and all the time I handled him he kept muttering and cursing, now talking in some foreign tongue, anon in a queer sea jargon; but I noticed that every now and then his hand would wander to his beard and feel for and clutch at the bauble which was suspended amongst the grey hairs. I did not touch it, but I noted it was oval in shape, convex on both sides, shaped like a shell, bright green in colour, clear like glass, and set in a frame of filigree brass work.

Furthermore, I found that a thin double chain, apparently of gold links, passed from this curious ornament and stretched from the back of his beard to the scraggy skin of his throat, where it disappeared.

As far as I could see, it had been looped through a fold of his cuticle, which had been perforated, just as the lobe of an ear may be pierced to admit some ring or trinket, or, as I was ere long to see, to carry the snuff-spoon of a savage. It was certainly an ingenious way of securing the safety of the bauble, for the chain was obscured by the beard hairs, and any one who thought to secure the glittering piece of glass by cutting off the beard while its owner slept would assuredly strike the metal links and in all probability drag upon the skin fold and wake the coxswain. What that worthy could be like in a rage I myself had discovered, and that when he was worn out with privation and fatigue!

"Woe betide the unhappy wight," thought I, "who tries to rob this ancient mariner of his charm or whatever it may be, in such a manner as I have indicated!" Had any tried the trick

I felt there was a probability, nay, a likelihood, that such now slept the sleep which is dispelled by one thing only, and that the trump of doom.

To secure this waif, if possible, from such a rude awakening, I made Dame Pottinger heat a brick at the fire, and, wrapping it in cloths, clapped it to his soles, while I heaped the bedding upon him and forced more nutriment down his throat, the changing and turning having enfeebled him in some measure. He revived again as evidenced by his pulse-beat, and eventually I deemed it safe to leave him locked in as before. It was the Sabbath, a day on which I was wont to rest as much as possible; but for all that I had work to do and a long ride to compass, there being several cases of a kind of spotted fever in the outlying farms. Consequently I was soon on Nancy's back, and she, good mare, fetlock deep in snow on the lone roads.

My round was not so dreary as I have known it, chiefly because my mind was well employed, and it was a relief to see folk who knew nothing to my discredit, were glad to have a sight of me, and were sorry when I quitted them. In my dealings with the sick I have ever made it a point to be cheery and even jovial, deeming a good sound pat on the back a better medicine than half the filth I was taught to dispense. Why, I have known me sit and crack jokes with a man till his jaw dropped, though to be sure he was an exceptional patient and a hopeless unbeliever, who was in a much more parlous state than I had supposed. I remember the case even to this day, for it is but rarely that one meets with a being who enjoys his own death-bed.

I am wandering from my theme, however, for all my dependents were very much alive, and in a fair way to mend, while on my return I was pleased to discover that my especial charge had made some slight improvement. The stupor had been replaced by something more like healthy slumber, and he awoke late in the afternoon, when I began to feed him.

His black eyes opened, he stared about him in a dazed way, and then the light of recollection came into his face.

He took his food quietly, though without much desire, and when he had done looked fixedly at me.

"I have forgot your name," said he, and his voice was very weak, a bad sign I told myself.

"Mortimer," I answered, "Doctor Henry Mortimer."

"To be sure, to be sure," he replied; "but a murrain on the Mortimer! You are Doctor Harry to me, and a —— good leech at that," he added, with a wonderful garnishing of oaths. He had actually a trick of breaking up a long word by inserting a swear in the middle of it, so that it is impossible to set down his converse precisely as he spoke. It was a mere habit with him, and not a pretty one, though it gave rise to some very amazing expressions.

"Ay, ay, Doctor Harry," he went on, muttering to himself, "you are the right breed, broad of back, true at heart, though plain of face, cursedly plain, my lancet-monger!"

His frankness was embarrassing, and, besides, I had not been wont to consider myself so very ill-looking, nor, for that matter, had one or two farmers' daughters in their time, though they had got scant satisfaction, I fear. I humoured him, however.

"Well, captain," said I, "we cannot all have your good looks, and must rest content."

He did not reply, but winked an eye at me again, an action more expressive than a dozen phrases, though it were hard to tell all that the wink denoted, and perhaps happily so.

"What do they make of me?" he asked presently.

"You mean the villagers?"

He nodded.

"Some have it you are the devil," he grinned feebly; "others that you have at least the evil eye;" he winked at me once more, "and yet others that you are a papist!"

"Godam!" said he, "is it likely that one who has been a galley slave of the holy Inquisition, and chained by the leg when an Algerine rover fired chain shot and threw stink-pots at him, should love the faith of the Don? No, no, Doctor Harry, Nicholas is a heretic. But what do you think?"

"Meaning as to my religion?"

"Body o' me! no, you may worship a yellow Khoi-Khoi for all I care! What do you think of me, of me?" He tapped himself on the chest.

"Think!" I answered; "I fancy you would make a good friend and a bad enemy."

"And that's a God's truth," he chuckled. "But you have not my meaning yet. Do you imagine I care one jot or tittle for your opinion upon my character? Stap me! no. What of my chances, Doctor Harry? Is it barnacles up my cock, or the leak found and a dry hold?"

I replied cautiously, as I would have done to an anxious patient or, rather, to his friend, for it is the latter who usually puts such a query, and more especially if there be a question of legacy, more shame to him!

He looked quaintly at me and gave a short hollow laugh.

"Do you take me for a lost soul?" said he; "a lost soul afraid of the brimstone? Man! I may pop at any moment. Is it not so?" he asked almost fiercely.

"It will be," I answered, "if you do not keep calm."

"It will be," he repeated scornfully; "why, my lad, it has been ever since I was weaned, or at least since ever I footed a plank. Boy and man old Nick has faced his namesake these fifty and odd years and baffled him, seen his tail, man! with the barb at the end of 't, and, split me! but he would see it again if it were worth his while."

"And is it not?" I asked.

"God knows," he answered wearily, and turned on his side.

It was not till evening that he spoke with me again. He was neither better nor worse, but his voice was a trifle stronger. I questioned him as to how he came to be so far from the sea and in such a sorry plight.

"You may ask," he said. "Bump on the Welsh rocks goes the *Three Sisters*, bound for the Mersey, and old Nicholas the only one to make the shore, as usual. Gad! but they squealed like scared rabbits when they should have saved their breaths. Well, 'tis the third time Nick Corkran has been the sole survivor of a ship's company, and they say the third time's lucky. Looks like it, Doctor Harry, does it not?"

"It looks," said I gravely, a trifle shocked at his levity, "as if your life was intended to be of some use to some one, if not to yourself."

Even so," he answered, "and, methinks, you are that man."

I wondered what he meant, but he went on to tell me that Bristol was the only decent port in the West country, that he was not acquainted with any of his calling there, but that knowing a ship's master in London who would give him a berth, he had set off to tramp it across country, had been overtaken by the wild wintry weather, had lost his bearings, and wandered miserably after having escaped from some filthy town gaol in which he had been lodged as a vagrant. Had I been doubtful as to whether or no he had always been the rough rip he appeared, his narration would have satisfied me, especially the bitterness with which he spoke of having been forced to beg his bread. He declaimed with such vehemence that he exhausted himself, and I prayed him to desist.

"Nay, nay," he gasped, "to-morrow may be too late ; you shall hear me to-night if it kills me."

For all that I would have left him, but that I was very curious to know what he had to say, and, moreover, saw little chance of his recovery, while his anxiety when I spoke of going did him more harm than his efforts at speech, so that after insisting on his resting for a space and plying him with some strong cordial, I allowed him to proceed. His first words surprised me.

"You have rifled my pockets, no doubt," he said ; "and what have you found ?"

"Sir," I answered with some heat, "all I know about your pockets is that those of the tail of your coat are in the seat of your breeches, and that somewhere in the latter you keep a brown and sticky mass which, when eaten, has a peculiar effect upon you."

"Your pardon, Doctor Harry," said he ; "but I have lived amongst thieves half my days. Now tell me, is there a mother Carey, and has she chickens ?"

I suppose I looked bewildered.

"Zounds, man ! is there a Mistress Harry, and a herd of brats ?"

"Why, no," I replied ; "you yourself, if I remember aright, predicted such a fate in store for me."

"Did I, then? I vow I do not recollect the prophecy. Well, hast any ties, my bachelor? Is there a fair maid or a grandam, or a cousin of whom you have expectations, or any kith or kin?"

I shook my head. "Since my father died I have been alone in this world, and have scarce a friend, save our vicar, who is fat and fifty."

"Right!" said he. "You are the man for my money. I am about to make my will, Doctor Harry, and, stap me! if I do not make you my heir."

"Heir!" I cried, "heir to what?"

"To the Golden Kingdom," said he, "the Golden Kingdom of Monomotapa."

For a moment I thought his wits were astray, but he was sane enough, though his black eyes were alight with excitement. He raised himself upon the pillow and moistened his parched lips with his tongue.

"Are you man enough," he croaked, "to face the perils of a long sea voyage, to eat the squirming weevils in the biscuit, to drink yellow water from stinking casks, to brave the wild beasts of the forest, to slay the Maligryghas, to starve and sweat and struggle to the goal? Have you a taste for strange ventures, a stiff backbone, and a stout heart? Have you, for there is the crux, a cure for the deadliest of swamp fevers? In short, my master, do you fear to become as I am, or do you not?"

What was I to say to such an harangue? I sat and stared at him in some dismay, but he clearly expected an answer, and, therefore, I replied to what I judged to be the most difficult of his questions.

"Slay what?" I asked. "Whom am I to slay?"

"Hee, hee!" he chuckled, "you would be at the blood-letting already, true to your craft, my doctor! Nay then, it is no dragon, nought but the Abatwa."

"The Abatwa?" I repeated, no wiser than before.

"A plague on you!" he exclaimed impatiently; "they are but pigmy savages, scarce four feet high!"

"He must be mad," I thought, and I resolved to humour him.

The Bauble in the Beard

57

"Egad ! captain," I said, "I will slay them two at a time."

"So far so good," he croaked. "And as to the other items?"

"I assure you," I answered, "that I love the sea, more particularly in time of tempest, account weevils a dainty, yellow water from stinking casks is my delight, I am a very Nimrod, fasting I look upon as wholesome, and sweating as beneficial to the kidneys. I have a longing for adventure, the backbone of an Englishman, and the heart of Corkran the Coxswain. As for the swamp fevers, they are my especial study, and the deadlier they are the better I like them."

All the time I spoke he kept ticking off the various points upon his lean and horny fingers, and when I had done he threw himself back and laughed till the tears stood in his eyes and I thought he would choke.

"Split me !" he croaked, "but this is a lad after mine own heart."

"Further," I continued, intent now upon the carrying through of the jest, "so little do I fear becoming like you that after having done all these things there is no place I should so much fancy as this very bed on which you lie, and no drink like the very cordial you have swallowed."

"Is it so?" he cried ; then

Sing hey ! for a voyage to the sunny Cape,
For a pouch full of gold and the juice of the grape,
For the rippling beach where the mermaids call,
For the yellow sands where the turtles crawl,
Yo, ho, ho,
Let the good ship go
Bunting above and bilge below."

His singing was of the feeblest, with many a stop and quaver, but it stirred me strangely. Visions danced before my eyes. I seemed to get a glimpse of foreign countries, to smell rich, ripe fruit, to see the sun-glare on broad green leaves, and then I came to myself and I was in the little chamber with a sick man, husky of voice, lying on a bed in a hollow of the wall and with the candle-light reflected from the glass bauble in his beard.

"What Cape?" I queried; "what Cape is this of which you sing?"

"'Tis what some have called the Cape of all the Storms," he answered, "but others, and these be right, have named it the Cape of Good Hope."

"Why," said I, "it is in Africa!"

"Even there, my great geographer," he replied, as he had once said before.

With that he began fingering the trinket and presently, just as I expected, for I was long past surprises by this time, it opened, being a kind of locket, and after much fumbling he pulled out of it a tiny folded piece of paper and handed it to me.

"Unfold it," he said.

I did so, and found that so thin was the stuff that it made quite a goodly spread when fully undone and smoothed out, though not much larger than a thumb-nail when flat and folded.

On it was traced in black ink, but little faded, the outline of a map. The main line, heavier than all the rest, ran in a curve beginning and ending abruptly, forming a crescent, I say, or rather an angle with a blunt irregular apex, and from the figures of ships drawn on one side of it I judged it to represent a coast line. My opinion was confirmed when I studied it nearer the candle flame. The names of capes and bays were marked. I read the words Good Hope and Agulhas, and against a tiny islet was written St. Croix.

Ere I could study it more fully Corkran called to me impatiently. He was leaning over the side of the bed, and when I approached him he motioned me to place a chair conveniently by him, and took the paper from my hand. Then when he had spread it out upon the seat of the chair, and as I held the candle so that its light illumined the tracings, he proceeded to explain the drawing, nor would he listen to my protestations when I assured him he would do himself harm.

"There," said he, "is the southern ocean first furrowed by the keels of the vessels of Bartholomew Diaz, the Portuguese. How is that river's mouth named?"

"The Do Infanta," I read.

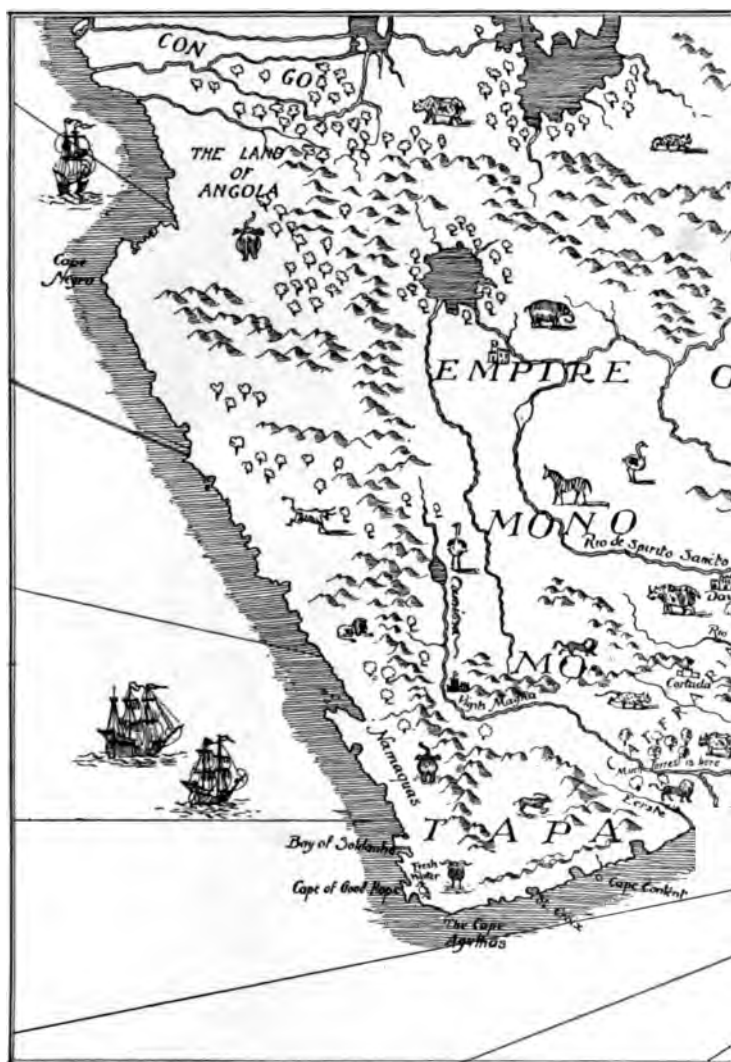


CHART OF CORKRAN,



"So! That is where he landed in the year of our Lord 1486. Hast read the 'Lusiad of Camoens'?"

"I have not so much as heard of it," I replied.

"And yet," said he, "you pride yourself upon your learning. Man, it sings the praises of one Vasco de Gama of Lusitania, called likewise Portugal."

"The navigator!" I cried.

"Even so, my great historian. See, my finger traces his course on the way to Calicut. But here I stop."

The black-tipped nail of his right forefinger, square cut and broken at the tip, had halted at a place where was a promontory and a bay.

"How is it called?" he asked eagerly.

"Three words," I answered, "run out from it into the sea, and they spell Terra de Natal."

"Ay, ay," he continued excitedly, "or Natal for short—the Christmas land, my lad, though devil a snowflake or an ice crust have I seen in it save on the highest mountain peaks. How many leagues, think you, is it from this speck in the deep we call England?"

I shook my head.

"Eight thousand sea miles, and more, my cock, and yet with a fair wind one may sight it in three months out of Plymouth Sound; but, look you, Perestrello was there long since, and many a barrel-bowed Dutch galiot has made the bay. On that very point I was cast away in a slaver, and of the two who swam to shore with me, one was taken by a shark, the other trampled to death by an elephant. Saw you ever an elephant, Doctor Harry?"

"Nay," said I, "save in books."

"Ho, ho!" he laughed. "I warrant the best book is that God made—the sea its title-page, and the forest a fair sheet also. That is where I have seen him—ay, and hunted him, my master. Stap me! but I have had this very wig of mine whipped off by his trunk, and thereby escaped alive. But enough—enough. Read me the other names."

"I see," said I, "a great mountain-chain in the westward running north and south."

"Go on," he croaked.

"Furthermore, a mighty river rises in it, and flows to the sea, meeting the latter at this cape called Agulhas. The river is named—is named," I added, peering at it closely, for a red, wavy line was drawn through the writing, "the Camissa."

"It is a lie!" he said shortly, "and is blotted out in blood—why and whose I may some day tell you."

"I see," said I, "two other rivers marked to the north of the land of Natal."

"Ay, ay, to the norrard—to the norrard are the Rio de St. Luzia and the Rio de Spirito Sancto."

"It is so marked," I answered.

"In some measure," he replied, "these also are lies."

"Do you tell me," said I, "that you have travelled all over this vast region—for such it seems, if the scale be not a further lie?"

"If I were a liar I would say yes," he answered. "As it is, I have traversed some of it, and, what is more, I have been where no white man has trod, and I have seen what no white man has seen."

"And what may that be?" I asked breathlessly.

"The Golden Kingdom," he replied for the second time.

"Why," I cried, "it is marked here, to the east of the Rio de Camissa! There are castles with turrets studded thick upon the paper, and across it is written Empire of Mono—of Monomo"—I spelt it slowly—"of Monomotapa."

"Ay, ay," said he, "the Empire of the Men of the Mines; but that also, Doctor Harry, is a lie."

"Then I am heir to a lie."

"No, no!" he shouted, and struck his clenched fist upon the chair-seat; "you are heir, if you will, to a kingdom of gold, or, at the least, to a sight of it."

"Which you have just told me does not exist."

"Which I was just about to tell you does not exist where marked."

"Then there is such a place?"

"Most assuredly, for with mine own eyes I have seen the golden walls of its chief city."

"The walls, and why not the streets, captain—the streets and its people?"

"Because," said he, very carefully, and watching my face as he spoke—"because of a great swamp, where is bred a pestilent fever, a swamp which no man may cross and live. Methinks, Doctor Harry, it is even such a fever as you like, for there is none deadlier in all Africa."

So this was the reason of his interest in the treatise of Rhazes the Arabian. I was, in his opinion, destined to help either himself or myself, or both of us, to safely pass this fever-stricken marsh; my knowledge, or rather that contained in the Latin volume, was to be the bridge.

"The bridge," thought I; "of a verity if we undertake its passage, it may be christened the Pons Asinorum"; for all this appeared to me the wildest nonsense I had ever heard.

"I perceive," I said, "why you were so intent on a certain tome yesternight; but I remember that the fact that I could speak Dutch also——"

"Yes, yes," he broke in, giving me no time to finish. "Who are the masters at the Cape of Good Hope? The Dutch, whom Van Riebeck, a man of your trade, planted there. Listen! He sent an expedition on this very quest. It failed. Why? Because his charts were wrong; for it is through Terra de Natal, and not by way of the River Camissa, that we must strike for the Men of the Mines. Still, much may be learned from these beamy Dutchmen, who know the country to the west; but they are born liars, and one must listen, and not question, for they will speak freely among themselves only."

"I take you," I replied; "but I recall a further remark you were pleased to make. From the facts that I owned a treatise on fevers and understood the tongue of Holland you appeared to find an argument against the infidel."

His face changed, and he glanced at me suspiciously.

"Well," said he, "and if I did, who else guided me to this dwelling unless it were our mutual Maker?"

"Granted," I answered; "but will the mere love of gold account for your desperate anxiety, your deadly earnestness?"

Why drag the name of God into such an unholy greed after filthy lucre?"

He looked as if he could have struck me, and then he laughed harshly.

"Greed, is't? What good will money-bags, and the yellow grains, and the golden bars do to a dying man? Tell me that, Doctor Harry. Stap me! but do you not see that such a kingdom won for England will make her lord of the land—will oust these stolid Dutch and greasy Portuguese? Have you no spirit of conquest, no thought to do mighty deeds, to advance the red cross of St. George, to be a Drake, a Blake, or—for I count him the greatest—a Sir Walter Raleigh, that pioneer of fortune?"

"Nay," said I bluntly; "nor, for the matter of that, have you."

He lay silent a moment, and his lips twitched.

"Perchance," he said presently, "I have had in my time too great a soul for my body; and mayhap I have another reason to advance. But, tell me, are you for the quest, or are you not?"

He tapped the paper with his dirty nail-tip; and looking at it again, I saw that on it were also drawn tiny figures of strange animals, huge birds, elephants, deer, and other horned beasts wholly unknown to me. I stared at him, wondering if I were on my head or my heels.

"Yea or nay?" he croaked; and I do not know which glittered most, his black, sunken eyes or the shining bauble in his beard. "Yea or nay?" he repeated.

"Captain," said I, willing to humour him, "there is no need of haste. Let me consider this mighty matter—take it *ad avisandum*."

"Yea or nay?" he almost shrieked, drumming with his fingertips on the chair-seat.

"Well," said I, "if you must have it, what answer can a sane man give to such a farrago of absurdities?"

"You will not go?" he croaked, his face deathly pale; "you will not go, you white-livered son of a land swab! you——" He broke into a torrent of wild language, utterly exhausting himself; and then, with trembling hands, caught up his precious chart,

folded it, and thrust it back into the bauble, which he closed with a snap that sounded vicious to my ears.

Suddenly he became quite calm.

"For all that, Doctor Henry Mortimer," he said, with a ludicrous solemnity, "you and I are to sail the seas together ; for so it was ordained when I came singing to your casement. Therefore, make haste, my lad, and put your affairs in order, for I go—I go very soon."

"To your own place," I added, under my breath and with somewhat of a shudder, as I blew out the candle and quitted the room.

CHAPTER V

A SON OF ANAK

I SOUGHT my bed and the sleep I so well deserved, but for hours the latter was denied me. I strove to keep my mind a blank, but my thoughts ever harked back to Corkran and his tale. I counted figures one after the other, and, lo! I was thinking of the number of sea miles he had mentioned. I would not believe his statements, and yet when I came to seriously consider them there was nothing that was impossible. I tossed and turned, but his eager visage haunted me, and every detail of his accursed chart was plain before my eyes. How was all this to end? Was I to bury him in a day or so and live as before my colourless if useful life, or was his last prophecy to be fulfilled? A great dread of the future came upon me, a sense of uncertainty, a feeling that life was precarious in the extreme. I seemed to be standing on the verge of some abyss, whose horrid depths were shrouded in mist and gloom, and then imperceptibly the mist of sleep must have gathered on my eyeballs, for I dreamed. My dream was a chaos, a wild confusion of vivid colours, of pigmy black men and horned beasts, of ships with gleaming white sails, and cities with glittering yellow walls. I breathed the foetid air of swamps, and battled with huge weevils which sought to devour me. Through it all I had no terror, I felt confident and big and brave, gloriously reckless, a creature of the moment, without a future, without a past. There was no order in my visions, they came and went and were mingled together, but eventually I recognised that I was ever following one bright spot, a lodestar, which gleamed and seemed to beckon me,

and just as I perceived that it was no other than the green bauble in Corkran's beard I woke to find that a feeble ray of sun was playing on my face, that my pillow was on the floor, and that my feet were where my head should have been.

I laughed, rose, and dressed hastily ; then, for I feared my liver must be sluggish, I took a cholagogue of my own compounding, the which I have since used amongst the settlers with much success, especially in those disorders due to the heat of the climate and their torpid habits.

I find, however, that I run in advance of my tale, half hinting at what is to follow, and so, as Corkran would have said, I must clew up and sail slowly. My first duty was again to visit the coxswain, and I found him sunk in a stupor similar to that which had mastered him previously. His strength was fairly well sustained, so I did not attempt to rouse him, but gave him in charge to Dame Pottinger, who, I think, was a trifle scared at his appearance, and no wonder.

The next ploy was to take my mare Nancy to the smithy and have all her four hoofs shod, for a couple of her frogs were well-nigh on the ground, and I feared she would go lame, albeit the roads were of the softest. My man usually led her thither, but I was minded to see this adventurous farrier of whom the vicar had spoken. The thought of the latter made me wonder how his sermon had succeeded, but I got no clue to its effect, for the village was silent as the grave, there being little field work in progress, and most of the folk abed. It was only as I neared the forge that signs of life were visible, and sounds of the same audible.

A curl of smoke was creeping from under the door lintel and rising in the air. It showed blue against the pure snow on the roof, and joined the thin column which streamed from the crusted chimney top. The smith, I judged, had not been long at work, or the white ring round the vent would ere this have been melted. He was busy at the bellows. I could hear the wood creak and the throbbing rush of air as the leathern bag closed on it and sent it streaming to the furnace. A moment later I and the mare were at the door, over which hung a sign on which was painted a horse

singularly like a donkey, to judge by the length of his ears and his rat-like, tufted tail. The place itself was always dark, and as I stooped and looked in I saw the cheerful sparks flying here and there to the pulsations of the great bag, the ruddy glow of the fuel quickening in colour as the blast struck it, and, lastly, the smith. The smith, I say, and of a truth he was a sight in himself. I stood still and stared at him, forgetting my manners, never uttering a morning's greeting, wholly amazed, while Nancy nuzzled her nose into the small of my back and stamped with the cold.

This is what I saw. A man of huge stature, whose enormous hands grasped the bellows' handles and met and parted as he blew with tremendous vigour. He was in his woollen shirt, the sleeves of which were rolled up to the elbow, and his forearms were those of a Samson. White of skin and apparently hairless, bulky as a man's thigh, the muscles standing out upon their extensor surfaces in ridges with deep grooves between, swelling larger as he pressed, sinking as the bag sucked and filled; verily, I had never seen such extremities. And the man matched them. I could not see him clearly, but the bulk of his figure impressed me mightily, bowed though he was. The vastness of his trunk and shoulders was imposing, and yet was not the cause of my wonderment. That which made me gaze at him with my mouth open was the fact, believe it or not as you will, that his hair was pure white. Not, mark you, the white of age, not the silver of an old man's pow, but something like the linty locks of a little child. I could see his thatch plainly, though his face was hidden as he bent over his work. The top of his head was toward me, the furnace light struck upon it, and, as I have said, his hair was white, white and plentiful. Presently my mare whinnied, and the smith straightened himself and looked at me. In spite of myself, I gave a cry of astonishment, for the man's eyebrows, and even his eyelashes, were of the same colour. There was also something peculiar about his face. Its expression was pleasant, with a sort of genial simplicity stamped upon it, but it wore a curiously rueful look, as if complaining silently in a good-natured way. This in some measure was due to the screwing up of his cheeks, for his eyes were scarce visible, and the man blinked and peered at me

like an old owl in the daytime. His complexion was very pale, but not unhealthy, and his features were well formed, though on the same scale as the rest of him.

For a moment I knew not what to think, and then I remembered descriptions I had read of such people, though I had never happened to see one of them. It was apparent to me that Jacob Little, for I recalled his name, was what is known as an albino. That is to say, he lacked pigment, he was devoid of the colouring matter which makes so much for beauty. No doubt a white rabbit is pleasing enough to the eye, but a white man, a wholly white man! Methinks I would have laughed, but that I had seen evidence of his strength, and therefore I made haste to smother all sign of merriment. I fancied I had heard or read that such unfortunates tended to be weakly. If such were the case here was an exception, and a notable one, for now that he stood erect the man loomed more huge than ever, his great height being also apparent. I myself am built on generous lines, but before this giant called, as if in irony, Jacob Little, I felt myself dwarfed and stunted. He appeared not to have heard my exclamation, and I made haste to atone for my lack of common courtesy.

"Give you good day," I said.

He grunted something in reply, and then came slowly towards me. For the first time I saw his legs, his apron being tucked away to one side in his belt, and they were fit pillars for the superstructure they carried. I noted, however, that he was somewhat ungainly, loosely built, what the Scotch in their expressive tongue call *shoughlin*. His movements were unwieldy, and his gait a trifle awkward. Still, he was a most formidable being, and the forge seemed a fitting place for such a Hercules.

"To be shod?" he asked. Plainly, he was a man of few words, this mighty blacksmith.

"Yes," I answered; "four shoes, and these of the lightest."

He took the halter from me, tied up the mare to a hook in the wall, and set to work. I sat on a convenient cask and watched him, for I was very curious to know if his eyes were pink, this being often another peculiarity of such folk, owing to want of pigment in the choroid. I could not decide the question at that

time, for he kept his eyes almost closed, as if the light hurt them, but it was strange to see how his blindness hampered him, and how he poked his nose perilously close to Nancy's hoofs and peered about for the tools he wanted. Presently he had the metal in the furnace, and, to aid him, I took a turn at the bellows as he had no assistant. He thanked me by another grunt and a beam of satisfaction. A merciful Providence had placed a double check on this man's strength, a feeble vision and a mild spirit. I considered it a wise dispensation, and more especially when Jacob came to handle the sledge hammer. The latter was out of all proportion to the work—a very massive tool, or rather, weapon, which he swung as though it had been a walking-cane.

Despite his near-sightedness, he never missed his mark. He would take the bearings of the glowing metal on the anvil, and then down would clang the hammer full upon it, and the sparks shower on every side. But the finest thing was to see the play of his muscles, to watch his great frame in rhythmic motion, to study the capacity of his chest, the girth of his whole body. There was no flabbiness about him. Raw, hard, and loose-jointed, such were his qualities.

I soon perceived he was no master of his craft—indeed, he was rather a clumsy workman; but he made no mistakes, nailed on the shoes sufficiently well, and did not injure the hoofs. I thanked him, and asked what was to pay. He pondered over the matter as though I had asked him about the state of his soul, and then named a very paltry sum, hesitating, as though he had demanded over much.

"Come, Master Little," said I, "you will find it hard to earn your bread at this rate of charge, more especially in Bishop-Solingford. He smiled cheerily, blinking at me as before.

"I am new to the trade," said he; "indeed——" he paused irresolute.

I noticed then that he was much younger than I had supposed, and that his speech belied him. This great fellow was no 'prentice out of articles, even if he were a blacksmith from choice. It seemed to me that I was dealing with a gentleman of sorts, at least a person of some breeding and education. Here was a new

mystery. As the vicar had exclaimed, "Was the world coming to an end?"

"Indeed," I said, finishing his sentence for him, "you make a very fair job of it, considering you were never born to wield hammers, manipulate pincers, and blow bellows."

It was ludicrous to see the surprise on his face.

"How know you that, sir?" he asked.

"Pooh!" I replied lightly; "I am the village doctor, man, whose business it is to know everything. For instance, I know you came here with the intent of shoeing Squire Pumphret's brute of a stallion, and hang me!" said I, carried away by admiration of his superb thews and sinews, "hang me, if I don't believe you'll do it!"

"Why, of course I will," he said simply.

"Have you seen the horse?" I asked.

"No," he answered; "but he will feel me," and he stood and clenched and unclenched his great hams of hands, whereon the knuckles were as large as filberts.

"I can believe that," said I. "And do you know, Master Little, I am glad I am not the horse."

His whole face wrinkled with laughter. He was like an overgrown, good-humoured boy, this son of Anak; as easily tickled with a mild joke as a fat trout is with cautious finger-tips, and I took an amazing fancy to him. All at once, however, his visage became rueful, as before, and he heaved a prodigious sigh.

"Heavens!" said I, in mock alarm, "you should be your own bellows."

I thought he would straightway take a fit. He laughed silently till he shook and his eyes disappeared altogether, and then he came to himself, as woe-begone as ever.

"Good day," said I, laying his proper fee on the anvil and preparing to depart.

"Stop!" he exclaimed, catching my arm, "I like you, doctor; I like a man who can make me laugh, for then I forget my misery."

"Egad!" thought I, "but Vulcan is going to make a confidant of me."

"Misery," I repeated, "are you ill?"

"No," said he, with a most comical face and air of grievance, "no, but I am too big."

I had much ado to keep sober sides.

"That is not all," he continued. "Consider my name, and look at this."

He touched his hair and his eyebrows in turn. The man was pathetic though ridiculous.

"Come, come, sir," said I; "you are as God made you, and if Nature has been niggardly in some respects, she has been lavish in others."

"Yes," he answered, "you are right; I thank you," and he held out his fist to me. I placed my hand in his somewhat gingerly, and, as it was, had it nearly reduced to pulp.

"Why, man!" I cried, "you do not know your own strength."

He nodded and blinked genially.

"You see how it is, doctor," he said, "though I know not why I should tell you all this; I was the youngest son of seven, my father a poor clergyman who could give me nothing but some schooling. Fortunately, I alone am of such a cursed complexion, and people made a mock of me; but now they do not do so."

"I should say not," I rejoined, "for if so, methinks you would make a pulp of them."

Again he laughed till he shook.

"You speak the truth," he continued. "I was born big and I said to myself, if I can be nothing else I will be strong, and that is why I have taken to the smith's trade. I have no brains, I am half blind, my hair is white, but, doctor, I can bend this iron bar into a hoop." He picked up a thin piece of metal and without making use of his knee fashioned it into a curve, apparently without much effort, though I remarked that afterwards beads of sweat stood out upon his forehead.

"But," said I, "what is your object in all this? You must have some purpose besides the wish to scare those who may jape at you?"

"Oh, yes," he replied slowly, "I have a purpose, certainly I have. I am looking for a man stronger than myself."

"Whew!" I whistled; "but that will be hard to find, man. Tell me, what will you do if you find him?"

"I have never thought of that," he answered simply; "I will know when we are set face to face."

"May I be there to see," I answered lightly, and never thought that one day I was indeed to witness the very scene, nor dreamed what was to hang upon the issue of that meeting.

CHAPTER VI

THE SHOEING OF THE STALLION

I RETURNED home vastly amused at this encounter. It appeared that I had now made two acquaintances—the one a madman, the other a simpleton; the one without any head of hair at all, the other with hair which dye alone would make and keep presentable; the one hankering after a fabled Kingdom of Gold with an outlandish name, in an outlandish place, the other seeking a man more powerful than himself, without rhyme or reason. To be sure the smith might have donned a wig, but I shrewdly suspected he was rather proud of his peculiarities despite his outcry. It is strange how some men—ay, and women—love an eccentricity, and dote on any means of securing distinction. I stabled the mare and hurried in for breakfast, still chuckling, and there with his back to the fireplace, bluff, bloated, and shewing signs of a debauch in his patchy colour, moist eyes, and vinous nose, was the squire himself.

“So, sir,” said he, without giving me time to utter a word, “you go about smiling while my poor wife lies dead in her coffin.”

I was so taken aback at this unexpected attack that I made no answer.

“Further,” he went on irritably, “I hear you were keeping low company on the very night you closed Mistress Pumphret’s eyes, and have been harbouring a vagabond in this house, of which I am the landlord. Now, sir, not a word, not a word. But I have suspected you for some time, and this cannot go on.”

The Shoeing of the Stallion

73

He tapped with his cane on the floor and finished, flushed and breathless.

"Squire Pumphret," said I quietly, "it is apparent you wish to pick a quarrel with me for no other reason that I can imagine but that you desire your nephew to take over my place and work."

He was about to speak, but I silenced him with a gesture of the hand. "No one, sir," I continued, "had a greater respect for your lately deceased wife than I had ; but pulling a long face and going about drowned in grief will not bring her back to life and is no criterion of feeling. He who makes the most display is not always the most touched." I could have said nothing more unfortunate.

"What !" cried he with an oath, "do you throw my sorrow in my teeth ! do you presume to suggest that, that, that—I make a pretence of——"

"Hold, sir !" I exclaimed sternly, though I felt half sorry for the forlorn, drunken figure before me. "You know full well that such was not my meaning. Let your nephew come, I am prepared to stand on my own legs ; but you will find, sir, that a scruple of practice is worth a pound weight of mere tutor's lore."

"Ay, ay, he'll come, he'll come, Doctor Mortimer. I'll teach you to turn your back on the Hall when I ask you to stay, and to keep me kicking my heels of a cold night in your porch ! Meanwhile you can bundle out of this snug house and find a roof-tree of which I do not take the rent."

There he held me in the hollow of his hand, for he owned nearly every cottage in the village and was as much a ruler as the Great Mogul.

"Considering your manners," I answered, "I have no desire to stay a moment longer in any house of yours. Indeed, were it not that you are a man advanced in years and none too steady of hand, I would teach you the risks you run in speaking thus to any gentleman. I have, however, a patient under my charge here who is not fit to be moved, and therefore I refuse to quit till he can go also."

"You defy me ?" stuttered the squire.

"No, sir," I thundered, my rage getting the better of me ; "but I

order you out of this, and the sooner you go the better for yourself!" I pointed to the door, and, after glaring at me a moment, he went, vowing vengeance at every step and threatening me with the law. I was much perturbed in spirit after he had gone. Grief and drink had made an irritable, suspicious sot of him, and this nephew of his was like to prove a thorn in my flesh. Still, I was not to be badgered by any squire, even if he happened to be the receiver of my rent; and yet my proper pride was getting me into an ugly mess. My pride, do I say? nay, rather, that tattered old rip who in an ill moment I had succoured and whom I now cursed with the greatest fluency and vigour. I dated all my troubles from his coming, forgetting that no doubt the squire had been pledged to further his nephew's interests long ago, and had but found an excuse for putting his designs into effect. I became very dolorous despite my cholagogue, called myself a failure, and felt little inclined for my work, especially as the weather had again become inclement and heavy flakes were falling softly from a leaden sky. In time, however, I shook myself free from this bout of cowardly melancholy, broke my fast in the hurried manner common to disciples of Æsculapius, and got me out of doors to see my village cases. In the first place I visited the vicar, and found that his precious sermon, though well meant, had done more harm than good. He had been so full of his theme that it seemed he had not devoted sufficient time to an eulogy of the late Dame Pumphret, at least so the squire affirmed, and rated him soundly for his neglect.

"Think of it!" said my good friend, spreading out his plump hands and bunches of fat fingers, and with a look of comical dismay, "think of it, fifteen minutes by the sand glass I devoted to that woman, and she as barren as my poll! What more could I say, and with such an allegory to follow? Harry, my boy, I am undone, and Amelia and the dear brats must starve. I shall be glad of the husks soon, and how will they keep my ribs covered, think you?"

"Nonsense, man!" said I, though to be sure he had a twinkle in his eye all the time he spoke, and needed not my remonstrances; "art but a humbug, Master Spetticue, and you have not yet told me how they swallowed the allegory."

"Faith, Harry," said he, "it was old Pumphret who came nigh swallowing me. It seems that he got it into his fuddled brain that as your mariner was the unfortunate in the parable, yourself the good Samaritan, myself the priest, and the villagers the Levite, that the only cast remaining for him was that of the thieves amongst whom the poor wretch fell. Thus there has been tribulation upon tribulation, and my plan has failed. You will find them all as sour as butter-milk this morning, and nothing will pacify them but to have what's his name clapped in the stocks and well pelted. Serve him right, say I, for being such an apple of discord—a very rotten apple, too, according to your own account."

"Maybe," I answered, "but the man has claimed my hospitality, and, moreover, is still at death's door; so if they want him they can come and take him, only they must settle with me first."

The parson shook his head and groaned dismally, being naturally of a timorous disposition, but I knew I had his sympathy, and I made a jest of things, though I felt far from merry. Nor was I cheered in the course of the day. People had too little work on hand, idle tongues were wagging, and one door was actually slammed in my face, from which I argued that the patient within was no worse and probably better. This world, I have long since found, is governed by expediency rather than principle.

The next few days were in themselves uneventful. Corkran continued in his strange stupor, and I kept the door locked upon him when I was out. He appeared to be gathering his strength again, though his brain was clouded, and he could only be roused when food or drink, and more especially the latter, was to be forced down his gullet. Still, he was not playing a part, of that I felt certain.

The squire's wife was duly buried, and I deemed it incumbent upon me to be present at her funeral, though I would have done better to have stayed away. The folk looked askance at me, the squire was sullen and unapproachable, and the poor vicar prayed fervently that all murmurings and grievings, angers and jealousies, uncharitableness and suspicions, harboured amongst and besetting those who yet remained, might be entombed in the sepulture of

forgetfulness. I felt a man apart—a creature shunned by his neighbours, and yet I had striven to do my duty by them so far as in me lay. I had humoured and ordered, had soothed and rallied, had warned and entreated many of them in my time, and this was what I had come to in the long run. They had so little faith in me that when I did something a trifle out of the common, they suspected me at once and gave me the cold shoulder. I confess I went home sorrowfully that day, and found no pleasure even in my books. It is scarcely fair, howbeit, that I should inflict my humours and vapourings on my readers (if, indeed, I chance to have any such), and I opine they would rather hear of how Squire Pumpfhret sought to occupy his mind, and of what befell in the smithy of Bishop-Solingford.

It was, I think, on the second day after the burial, Corkran being *in statu quo*, and the weather still very wintry with no sign of frost, that my stable man came running in to tell me that Hercules, the stallion, was to be shod, or at least that the smith was to attempt to shoe him—a very different matter. I inquired at what hour the spectacle was to take place, and so arranged my affairs that I was early on the scene, and was greeted quite affectionately by the huge smith, who was wholly unmoved at the prospect before him, and appeared to relish the chance of meeting such an opponent as the great horse. In virtue of my profession, and by invitation of Jacob Little himself, I took up a post of honour within the shed, at the door of which a crowd of interested spectators had already begun to gather.

"Will they not obscure the light?" I asked.

"Well," replied Jacob, "if so it is all the better. I see best in the dark—indeed, that is another reason why the forge work suits me."

"To be sure," I answered, vexed at having put so idle a question, for a moment's thought would have shown me that the wider his pupils the better would he see, as it is when bright beams fall upon the eye that its wonderful mechanism, its delicate curtain, shuts off access of light, while in darkness the screen is drawn back, and permits a flood of what light there is to reach the retina. Even then the odd idea came to me that

when the smith met the object of his quest it would be well for him if the encounter took place in the gloaming or at night, and I amused myself by imagining how this strange faculty might be of service to him. I fear my thoughts ran riot in those days, for certain it is that I never became acquainted with a man of any interest but that I built up tales about him, and made him a hero or a villain on the spot. Of a verity I was of a curious disposition, and to this day remain inquisitive.

A murmur from the throng at the door announced the approach of the stallion, and presently I could hear the squire's voice bidding the people stand apart. They formed a double line with a wide lane between, and old Pumphret came bustling in, scowled at me, and nodded amiably to Jacob Little, who showed him none of that cringing servility with which most of the hinds about were wont to flatter his vanity and encourage his self-complacency. A young man of elegant figure, dressed with extreme care, not to say foppishness, followed him in and surveyed me with an air which plainly remarked, "Who is this large, rough, uncouth fellow, who looks aggressive, and whose clothes are cursedly ill-cut?" Instinctively I knew him to be my future rival, the squire's nephew from London.

My opinion was quickly confirmed.

"Stand clear there, dam'ee!" shouted Pumphret to the crowd without; "stand clear, as you value your skins and bones!"

The lane widened, and I heard the sound of a snort.

"To take every care," cried the squire, anxious to justify himself, "I have brought my nephew, a skilled chirurgeon from London, who will do what may be necessary in case of accident."

"The devil he will!" thought I, and glanced at the smith, who shook his massive head slightly, though he blinked genially on old Pumphret and the youth of fripperies beside him.

I confess I was hurt when the crowd cheered this announcement, but I remained quietly in my corner and bided my time, while my supplanter stared with all his eyes at the enormous figure of the smith, compared with whom he was as a puppet. The whole scene was indeed peculiar—the patch of grey sky and miry road, the latter lined by two rows of ruddy faces, all viewed

through the open door. Within, a boy, a very proud boy, heaving away at the bellows as if his life depended on it; a fire glowing red-hot; the huge smith, with his superb arms folded across his mighty chest; the squire, boozy of visage and clumsy of figure; the airy trifle called a surgeon, myself glooming in the background, a truss of straw on the floor for some reason or other, and the all-pervading odour of a forge, the smell of rusty iron scraps, of pungent smoke and singed leather.

The crowd had been jabbering at a great rate, discussing the blacksmith with awe and wonder, myself with scant courtesy, the stallion with dread, and the coming event with a fearful expectancy, but all of a sudden a hubbub arose, and there were screams and cries mingled with the snortings of a scared and spirited horse, and the curses of those who led him. We all hurried to the door, and there was the stallion, rearing and plunging, with two men at his head and a clear space about his heels.

He was an ugly customer, the red visible in his eyes and nostrils, his muzzle curling back to show his teeth, his ears flat on his neck, and the whole vast bulk of him in tumultuous motion. It was madness, and worse than madness, to ask any man to shoe the brute, and I would have protested but that I knew it would serve no purpose. As the horse reared he struck out with his forefeet in a manner exceeding dangerous, but some one caught him cunningly on the flank with a whip lash, and he made a sudden bound and plunge which scattered the little group at the door, and landed him inside the shed, the man holding one of the ropes being nearly crushed against the wall in passing through. Once within, puzzled no doubt by the sudden change, Hercules grew quiet and suffered himself to be fastened to the hook in the wall by a very thick piece of rope and two straps of leather passing from his head stall. I perceived that the truss of straw was on the ground close beside him, and wondered what its use might be.

"Now, Master Little," said the squire, cuffing the ears of an adventurous brat who had run in after the horse, "I want Hercules here shod, but God forbid I should compel any man to face his heels. The first who tried it, he being a free agent,

is now a cripple ; the second, acting also by his own desire, is dead ; you are the third, but——”

“You may save your breath, sir,” answered Jacob, who was surveying the stallion with a look of chastened joy ; “I came here to shoe this horse and I am going to shoe him, even if he had before now killed every man in the parish.”

“Hoity toity !” quoth Pumphret, “here’s a devilish independent fellow, nephew. Well, well, go to work, sir, go to work, and Master Edwin Fairfax here will set your broken bones, and patch you up if you come to grief.”

“Haw,” said Master Edwin, “deucedly large bones to set ; ’pon honour, uncle, I fancy not your commission.”

“Haw !” thought I, “methinks hee-haw would suit this ass better,” for I hate those affected city fops, with their clipped expressions and mincing manners ; and then I had no time to think further, for Jacob Little had gone to work with a vengeance. The first thing to do was to take a measurement of the stallion’s hoofs, for no one had ever got the length of beating out shoes for him, and there was thus no standard to guide the artificer. It had been the horse that had done the beating on previous occasions, beating in ribs and beating out brains, but none had tackled Hercules as Jacob did, and none like Jacob had ever laid hand on the great Lincolnshire thoroughbred. The smith’s first movement was to slacken the rope and straps so as to give them greater length, and this he did very cautiously and remarkably quickly, the hook being set in a dark corner of the shed, and the horse for a wonder remaining passive. Then taking off his apron, and clad only in his shoes, hosen, knee breeches, and woollen, sleeveless shirt, Jacob Little did a strange thing. He walked back a short space along the wall, crouched double, and then with a rapid run in an oblique line hurled the full weight of his body on the stallion’s chest, and flung his arms round its forelegs. Hercules backed instantly till rope and straps were taut, and thus his head was fixed and the smith safe from his crushing teeth. Then began a tremendous struggle. It was the man’s object to throw the horse, to pitch it over on its side upon the straw, and it was the stallion’s object to defeat

him. The brute tried to rear, but in vain ; its head was kept stretched out by the halters, its forelegs gripped in a mighty grasp. It strove to press forward, but here again was foiled, encountering all the strength and weight of its adversary, who was lost if the fastenings slackened or gave way. With body bent, feet firmly planted wide apart, and one shoulder thrust against the chest muscles of the horse, Jacob stood immovable as a rock. Hercules snorted with pain and rage, the foam flecked his muzzle, he was the incarnation of impotent wrath. Then suddenly he changed his tactics and swung to the side. But the smith was ready for him. He could not check the movement wholly, but he could and he did keep the animal at the full length of its tether, and consequently helpless in some measure. Hither and thither the horse drove the hinder part of its body, mostly by convulsive bounds or jerks, while its tail stood straight on end, and a dew of sweat broke out upon its withers. Then its snortings changed to a scream of fear, and any sound more dreadful than the cry of a terrified horse is difficult to imagine. The folk came flocking in from outside, the squire danced about in a frenzy, fearful for the safety of his brute's legs, the famous surgeon grew pale of cheek, having no doubt visions of what might be required of him, and qualms as to his surgical capacity, and then in a twinkling it was done. Hercules lost control of himself, and began lashing out with his hindlegs in every direction.

Now was the smith's time. He must have felt his opportunity, for with one mighty heave he wrenched the forelegs off the ground, and as at the moment both of the free hoofs were high in the air, the vast bulk of the horse crashed heavily upon the straw, at first twisted, and then flat upon its side. It may seem incredible, but, believe it or not as you will, the smith so far was the victor, though only to a certain extent. As the stallion fell he fell also, and one of his arms became somehow pinned beneath its chest. There they lay, the horse for a wonder apparently unharmed, with its head and neck dragged upwards by the strain upon them, Jacob Little with his white hair pressed against the creature's black chest, and both remaining perfectly still. The

The Shoeing of the Stallion

81

smith made a movement to free his imprisoned left arm, and in a moment the horse was struggling desperately. It was clear that the man, hampered as he was, could scarcely hope to keep his grasp upon its forelegs. He desisted from his attempt, and at once the horse became quiet.

"It seems, sir," said I to the squire, "that the time has now come for the chirurgeon to act."

I was amply repaid for all the slights put upon me by the look on the face of the elegant from London.

"Zounds!" he exclaimed, "do you take me for a dirty horse doctor?"

"No, sir," said I, unkindly I admit; "but I perceive you are a coward."

He flushed hotly, while the squire was speechless with anger; but I had no time to note further the effects of my shaft. I ran forward, there being in reality little danger, and succeeded by a quick wrench in dragging the smith away from Hercules, though he was mortal heavy. The moment the stallion was free it rolled upon its back, kicking vigorously, and then would have turned over and been upon its legs again had not Jacob Little, who seemed none the worse, sprang up and thrown the noose of a rope round its hindlegs. This he drew tight and fastened the end of the rope to a strong wooden post near the forge.

"Stop it!" cried old Pumphret, "you will hurt him; do you hear me, you impudent fellow?"

Jacob Little merely blinked kindly at him, and got a similar fastening on the poor brute's forelegs.

The squire blustered; but what could he do to check this huge impassive man, with whom every one else, except perhaps Master Fairfax, appeared to be in sympathy?

"This is not shoeing," shouted the squire, "it is cruelty; you take an unfair advantage of my horse."

In his excitement he had come close up to the stallion.

"Indeed!" was all the smith said, and, stooping, he cut the noose and patted Hercules upon the haunch.

It was a sight to see the squire skip out of the way as the animal lashed out again in a fury. It could do nothing else,

however, being effectually tethered and hobbled. Then, indeed, I saw Jacob's plan. He was going to master the beast leg by leg. And he did so, despite its struggles and the protestations of its owner, who, however, had the sense to keep quiet when he saw that no harm was done or intended. In spite of all Hercules could do, and he also quickly resigned himself to the inevitable, Jacob Little measured each hind hoof, and forged and beat out a shoe for each. It was wonderful to watch him. It was as though he were rejoicing in his victory and strength, and he wielded the great sledge-hammer as though it had been a toy. The red sparks scattered at his blows, the proud boy blew his bellows till he well-nigh burst, the crowd gasped and gaped with astonishment, the squire mopped his brow, the famous surgeon regained his natural pasty colour, and I chuckled inwardly, albeit I knew this was not the end.

Jacob, no whit abashed, pared and prepared each virgin hoof, fitted on the heavy shoes and drove home the nails, working slowly but carefully. The stallion lay almost like a dead thing, though the smith had eased its head.

The fight was out of it, however; it had met its match, and more than its match. The only signs of life it gave after a wild burst of rage were its tremblings, the quiverings of its nostrils, and the sound of its breathings. When he had finished off the hind hoofs Jacob tackled the others, and though his work took a long time, being done in a difficult and constrained position, not one of the spectators thought of leaving. He finished at last to his satisfaction, and, taking down a whip from the wall, gave Hercules one sound cut with it across the back. The horse promptly got upon its knees, and so to its legs, and after shaking itself stood quaking in every limb, and gazing timidly out of its blood-streaked, rolling eye. Its whole aspect was changed, it was cowed and crushed in spirit. Had it been a woman, ay, or even a man, it would have burst into tears. As it was, I am not sure but that it wept in its own way. The smith patted it, felt its legs, straightened out its mane, put his tools away, turned and blinked at us all, and then politely bade us good-day.

There was nothing for it but to go, the villagers first, then the

The Shoeing of the Stallion

83

squire and his nephew, then the squire's servants and the horse, the latter hanging its head and looking most disconsolate, while its shoes drummed at every hoof-stroke on the hard earthen floor of the smithy, and lastly myself, but not before I had gone up to Jacob Little and offered him my hand.

"Squeeze it if you will," said I ; " but hang me ! if you are not a man of your word."

"I told you so, doctor," was all his reply, and he dealt very gently with my fingers, I think by way of thanks.

Thus was shod the terror of Bishop-Solingford, and I doubt not that the tale is still told in every parish throughout whose acres Hercules, Squire Pumphret's stallion, had spread his fame.

CHAPTER VII

A STATE OF SIEGE

I HAD burned my boats, and what was I to do now? I had insulted the squire, and mocked his precious nephew, though perhaps my position with the villagers was improved. I debated in my mind as to whether it was likely this Master Fairfax would send me a challenge. Not that I greatly cared. In Holland I had been careful to take lessons with the small sword, and, by way of diversion in the summer time, was wont to train my pistols on a mark. Thus I knew to a nicety my powers in those directions, and I fancied I had a stronger wrist and a truer eye than the elegant chirurgeon could boast. I might have saved myself the consideration of such a meeting, for old Pumphret was set on greater things. He was resolved to turn me out of house and home, and to make an example of my tatterdemalion.

I had an inkling that something was about to happen, for my reception in the village grew more and more churlish. A few, indeed, stood by their old leech, and of these I have ever thought kindly, some of them actually having no need of my services at the time. The majority, however, feared and served the squire, and took sides with him. In vain the vicar prophesied evil, and begged me to get rid of Corkran in some way or other. He was all for peace. So also was I, but with this difference—that whereas he would have had me sue for it on any terms, I was resolved to secure it with honour or woo its counterpart.

Abel Pike became openly offensive to me, till one day I laid him by the heels, after shaking his beer-scented breath well-nigh

out of him. The act, I think, precipitated the storm, which broke in this wise.

The coxswain had mended, but was yet confined to the box-bed, and was in a dull, heavy, and confused state. Still, his heart had recovered tone, and I opined his silence was rather due to sulkiness or the revolving of mighty thoughts than to any dregs of the stupor. I had not meddled with any of his belongings—save the mark!—with the exception of the sticky drug mass, which I had removed from his breeches pocket, fearing he would do himself much harm if he fell to chewing at it again. Though better, he was in no way fit to rise, still less to take the road, especially as it snowed every night with a calm persistence, clearing generally about second cockcrow and remaining clear during the brief day.

One morning, after having eaten, I was sitting disconsolate with no heart for work, when I became aware of a tapping on the window-pane. A figure stood without—the figure of a woman with her face concealed by a hood. I rose, crossed the room, and opened the casement.

“What do you want?” I asked.

“Hush!” said she hurriedly. “I but come to tell you to save yourself. The squire has a writ out against you, and they are about to turn you out, and to seize the evil fellow who lodges with you. Not that I care for him, but make haste and go.”

With that she was gone herself; but I had recognised her voice and was touched by her kindness. She was a poor lass who had been wronged; but I had managed—for we of the lancet have sometimes more power than those of the cassock, or even the law-ledger—I had managed, I say, to get the man to make her a decent woman, and so saved her from shame. She had not heretofore shown much gratitude, perhaps because, so strange are women, her babe had died at birth; but now, at some small risk to herself, she had come to warn me.

“Go,” she had said. “Fly,” she meant; quit the place as though I had done wrong, and leave the queer old rogue in the box-bed to the tender mercies of a superstitious set of oafs!

I thanked her in my heart, but such was not my intention. Instead I went and locked both outer doors, bolting that in front and barring that which entered on the garden, and then sat quietly down and waited. Corkran and I were alone in the house, Dame Pottinger being abroad, for which I was not sorry. It is ill to be hampered with females, youthful or aged, at such a time. I did not secure the door of the sick-room, for it might be needful to beat a hurried retreat into it; but I remained in the front room, and wondered if there was any way of scaring off my coming assailants by threatening them with volatile poison or some other concoction which would appeal to their dense brains and fear of learning. I knew very well they held me in some repute, while I shrewdly guessed that they were mortally afraid of my unbidden guest.

No scheme, however, presented itself to my mind, except the somewhat feeble one of producing an appalling stench with asafetida and some other savoury compounds I kept in the cupboard. These I reserved for dire necessity and, indeed, had little time to do anything, for with their footsteps muffled by the snow, my persecutors were presently before the house. There was a goodly crowd of them, led by the squire in person, with Master Edwin Fairfax in attendance, perchance as a precaution against eventualities, as I grimly thought, for I was not to be trifled with in my then mood. There were Pumphret's own body servants, and the watchman from the Hall, the workers at the home-farm, a fair proportion of Bishop-Solingfordites, to give them a high-sounding title, with Abel Pike in prominence, and a sprinkling of boys ripe for any mischief. The squire and the surgeon wore their swords, and some of the rest had the impudence to appear with pitchforks. Abel, the sour rascal, had a weapon of his own, a rusty pike, which in bygone days had belonged to some Parliamentaryman, and had found a resting-place at The Green Frog, where many stories had gathered about it. I remembered I had more than once lanced a boil for him. No doubt he hoped to be able to repay me old scores by prodding me with the pike, and letting out, not yellow matter, but my good red blood,

"Malediction!" thought I, "would that I had shaken the teeth as well as the breath out of the ill-conditioned sot!"

I never budged from my chair, but sat and watched them gathering in the middle of the street, and wondered what they would do. As yet I was not angry, I was only beginning to be annoyed. Presently the squire strode forwards and beat with his staff upon the oak.

"Doctor Mortimer!" he cried, "Doctor Mortimer!" as he had done on the eventful night when his wife died.

I went over to the window and opened it.

"Give you good day, squire," I said quietly, "may I ask your pleasure, and the meaning of this assemblage?"

"It bodes you no harm, sir," he answered civilly enough. "True, I require the use of mine own cottage, but you can leave it at Lady's Day in due order; none can say I am hard upon my tenants."

"And that's a truth!" cried a voice.

"Three cheers for the squoire!" shouted Abel Pike, and a thin and disconnected series of huzzas followed his call.

This was a shrewd stroke of old Pumphret's, and methought I smelt the town rat in it.

"I thank you for your remarkable clemency," I replied ironically; "but is it customary to be attended by an armed retinue when you impart such very ordinary information? I confess I had thought it a private matter 'twixt you and me."

"And so 'tis," he rejoined bluffly, "but there is a public business as well which has brought us trooping here, and is the occasion of our weapons. You are harbouring within some lewd fellow, a vagrant and graceless sinner, whom we have reason to understand is on an ill errand."

"A Papisher, belike!" cried Abel Pike, who having no religion of his own, was fond of disputing on religious themes with much blasphemy and beer-drinking.

"Papist or no," said the squire, who was sober and would not commit himself, "this almoner is a suspicious party, a danger to the lieges, a singer of profane songs upon the Sabbath day, a broken and landless man, who must be delivered up to me, who

am a justice and will see to it that he is well flogged, and turned out of Bishop-Solingford."

The crowd, growing ever larger, cheered vociferously. This diversion came as a godsend to them these weary winter days.

"Indeed!" I answered. "Now listen to me, Squire Pumphret, and all of you. In what has been said I only know one word that is true. The man, poor devil, has been called landless, and so he is, for he follows the sea, a good trade I take it, and one whose 'prentices have made England. Landless he is, but hatless, penniless, and well-nigh shoeless also." I had half a mind to add hairless, but refrained.

"He came whining to me, cold, famished and miserable, on an inclement night, and I gave him food and shelter. His misfortunes had touched his brain, hence his singing and turbulence, if you can call it so. Since then he has lain at death's door, and is still in bed, and weak and worn. You, who have warm chimney-seats and hearths, and a plenty for your bellies, and clothes to your backs, have you no pity for a grey-bearded wanderer, who, as I am a truthful man, had never a stitch between his coat and his skin?"

I saw that my words had due effect.

"The poor creature!" a woman cried, and "This bitter cold weather too!" another exclaimed, but even as I began to hope Abel Pike ruined all.

"A fine tale!" he sneered. "Hath he fixed you with his eye so that you lie as well as strike down children? Did I not see the Papisher myself, with the scapular in his beard and the drink in his eye and the filthy song in his mouth? Go to, Doctor Mortimer, we be not vules!" and he shook his head waggishly.

"Sir," said I, appealing directly to the squire, "will you believe that man whom you know to be a drunken, heartless loafer, or will you believe me, who has lived here hitherto without reproach, and my father before me?"

Master Fairfax whispered hurriedly into his uncle's ear.

"That is beside the question, Doctor Mortimer," replied old Pumphret, as though repeating his lesson,

"I did not ask your nephew," I answered pointedly, "I addressed you, sir."

Some in the throng behind him laughed, and the squire flared into a rage.

"I am not here to bandy words," he called out loudly. "Hand over this rascalion to be dealt with as the law may direct, and let us begone."

"You forget," I said in desperation, "that the man is sick and under my charge. Would you have a physician neglect, ay, and more than neglect, his patient?"

"Dam'ee, sir!" suddenly shrilled out the elegant in a queer, piping voice, "did you not neglect Mistress Pumphret on her death-bed?"

"By the Lord, sir," I answered, very calmly but full of consuming wrath, "whatever I did I shall not neglect to make you eat your own words."

"Oons!" cried Abel Pike, who picked up all manner of oaths from occasional horsemen putting up at the inn, "the Papisher has cast a spell on him. Whoi, he be no more ill than I be, he bees in hiding; but us'll drag him out as if 'twere a burrowed badger!"

"And a sorry nose thou'lt have if thou triest, my friend Pike," I cried, mimicking him.

"Zounds!" shouted Pumphret, "but this is threatening language; this is treason, sir, you set at naught the constituted Powers."

"A fig for your Powers!" I exclaimed, utterly disgusted, and with my patience at an end. "I see you are a pack of cowardly curs, bent on worrying an old and feeble sea-dog, who, if he could show his teeth, would send the whole pack of you scuttling. You want my patient; well, come and take him, and that at your peril!"

I had said my say, and my last speech was quickly answered, even as I closed the window, by the tinkling sound which glass makes as it is shattered. A little ball of frozen snow had struck a lozenged pane, and driven it inwards in small pieces.

Again I swung open the casement,

"I call you to witness, Squire Pumphret," I shouted, "that this house belongs to you, and I am in no way responsible for damage done to it by yonder rabble."

Such was my parting shot, and it made them pause in their proceedings. Some one tried the door, and beat upon it with his fists; but I took up my position out of line with the window, picked up a book, and made a pretence of reading it, with a great show of unconcern, though my ears were stretched to catch every sound. Both doors were fast barred, however, and there was no large window at the back, the tiny kitchen being lit from the roof by a small skylight, which I had securely closed and fastened, and beneath which, on the floor, I had set a tub filled with cold water. I turned the pages idly, and then, as chance would have it, my eye lit on this sentence, and I recognised that the volume was the treatise of Rhazes the Arabian:

"Barbari tamen, nonnullis in locis cummem quamdam, ex arboribus lectam sese unguentes ad sua corpora adhibent, ut hunc in modum defensi, paludes incolumes transgrediantur."

I translated it rapidly then and there, the while the squire and his nephew debated as how best to seize my citadel without suffering in pocket, and this is the sense I made of it:

"The barbarians in some parts, however, make use of a certain gum, taken from trees, wherewith they anoint their bodies, so that, being thus protected, they may pass through the marshes in safety."

I remember thinking the statement incredible, but all thought of it was quickly driven from my mind by the sudden assault which was made on the house.

Whether the squire's rage had mastered his love of guineas, or whether the mob, for it was little better, had taken matters into their own hands, I cannot tell. Certain is is they proceeded to bombard the cottage. Missiles were to be had for the making. There had been no frost to prevent the soft and fluffy snow being kneaded into firm balls, ay, and into hard, rounded, half-frozen blocks, and a regular volley crashed upon the window pane, while there was a beating and a thundering on the stout outer door. The glass cracked and splintered, the wooden lattice-work was

driven in; snowballs and slush came hurtling through the room, and splashed and thudded against the opposite wall. The villagers cheered; this was indeed a great ploy, a mimic battle, and the cannonade all on one side!

"Huzza!" they yelled, and followed the first fusillade with a second.

I had sprung to my feet and was sheltering in a corner, but I laid hold of a good stout stick wherewith to crack the first pate that had the presumption to come thrusting within my domain. "An Englishman's house is his castle," they say, and faith, thought I, "if its defences be weak they will find its defender strong."

"Defender," I said to myself, but I was wrong. Suddenly the door of the room swung open, and before my astonished eyes appeared none other than Corkran the Coxswain. He had slipped on his faded and yellow breeches, and twisted his red sash round his waist, but the woollen shirt in which I had garbed him constituted the rest of his attire, and its sleeves were rolled up above each pointed and skinny elbow. His feet and legs were bare, a piece of coloured cloth, torn, as I thereafter found, from the patchwork coverlet of the bed, was bound about his temples, and above it the hair of his wig cropped upwards like the red crest of a fighting cock. Each hand grasped one of his pistols, which I had fondly fancied were placed beyond his reach on a high shelf, and I noted the dog-heads were drawn backwards to the full. His face, so long dull and expressionless, was now lit up with excitement. His eyes glittered, his nostrils quivered, his lean jaw worked from side to side till the beard depending from it waggled to and fro, bauble and all. His whole head was thrown back, and he entered, with a roll in his walk as though on ship-board. Once in Holland I had seen a print depicting a great sea fight of Van Tromp, and at a glance I knew what my ancient mariner had done. By all the fiends! he whom I had thought half dead, who had been in a stupor day after day, who had been fed like a babe, and tended as a helpless invalid, he, I say, had stripped for action!

"Split me!" he cried, "what pirate is this has boarded us?"

Never a hail do I hear, and the first noise of the fight the crash of the cabin windows. Where in thunder is the boatswain?"

He glared about him, and then caught sight of me.

"Pipe, you lubber, pipe to quarters!" he roared, his voice of an astonishing strength.

In a moment, entering into this amazing performance with all my heart, I put my fingers to my lips, a trick of my boyhood, and whistled long and loud.

"Boarders!" he shouted. "Prepare to repel boarders, and clear away that carronade aft!"

"Ay, ay, sir," I answered, half stupid with surprise, half consumed with mirth.

A third shower of missiles completed the demolition of the window, and a hard lump of snow caught Corkran full on the nose.

With some outlandish sea oath he sprang to the casement before I could stop him.

"Strike!" he yelled. "I give you one minute to strike ere I send you to perdition with a broadside," and then he passed the back of one hand across his eyes, still gripping the pistol, and gave vent to a hoarse cackle of a laugh. It was no wonder; a good dozen of the valiant foe were running for their lives, and the rest were staring at him with mouths agape and round eyes of astonishment.

"Stap me!" cried he, "I had forgot. What folly have we here?"

I laid a hand on his shoulder, and he slewed round quickly.

"Ho, ho, Doctor Harry!" he shouted, "so this is the game! Blessed if I didn't fancy I was aboard the *Bird o' Paradise*, and round shot raking us astern."

"Come away," I cried hastily, "you'll get your death, man!"

"Death!" he laughed shrilly; "I reckon I know where the death will be."

"You fools!" I shouted to the crowd. "Did I not tell you he was mad? will you begone before he does you an injury?"

His pistols, to be sure, were unloaded, but I hoped still further to scare the villagers. The squire, however, behind whom

Master Fairfax had found shelter, was, to do him justice, a man of courage. He tugged at his sword, which had evidently rusted in its sheath, and at last freed it and whipped it forth.

"Lay down your pistols and surrender, sir," he bellowed, "or we will make mincemeat of you!"

"Surrender!" chuckled Corkran. "Hark to that now, and not a shot fired! Do you take me for a swab of a Don, my old Commodore with the pig-sticker?"

He flourished a pistol at the throng, and its ranks grew yet thinner.

"By Daddy Neptune, Doctor Harry," he cried, "they melt away at the sight of a barrel! Split me! if they be worth fighting."

"No, no," I said; "let us parley with them."

He was standing with his one arm thrust through the window space and the weapon pointed at the squire, when there was a rush from the side, a man seized his wrist with both hands, and a cheer went up from the crowd. Abel Pike, for it was he, had sneaked along the house wall unnoticed, dropped his weapon, and rushed to close quarters, intent upon securing the pistol, and no doubt ignorant that Corkran carried another. Bitterly was he undeceived, and so, for that matter, was I, when I had supposed both barkers to be harmless.

"Ho, ho, my cock!" shouted Corkran, and with that he pitched up his other hand, there was a sharp report, a streak of flame from the bell mouth, a flash from the pan, and a puff of white smoke.

He had discharged his second pistol full into the man's body.

Without a cry Abel Pike released his hold on the wrist, doubled up like an empty, folding sack, and collapsed face downwards on the snow, and as he did so the cheer of the mob changed into an angry yell.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SONG OF THE SMITH

I stood aghast at this deed of violence, and then I acted on the spur of the moment. Dragging Corkran back from the window, I leaped out, picked up the senseless body, and bundled it over the sill, following it myself with all haste. I had now a hostage, though whether living or dead I could not tell. If the former, I could doctor him, and make some amends for the coxswain's rashness; if the latter, it was as well his allies should not know it for a certainty. No doubt they would imagine the worst, but for the nonce they were stupefied with horror. A murder, or the next thing to it, had been committed before their eyes; and after one howl of rage they fled from the spot, gathering into a knot farther down the street, and well out of pistol-range.

"Smartly done, Doctor Harry," said Corkran, with an approving grin, and staggered over to the big chair, into which he sank.

"A thousand curses on you!" I cried, as I knelt by Abel's side. "You have made bad worse. We are utterly undone."

"Pish!" said he. "We have a breathing-space. But, tell me, what is the reason for all this to-do?"

I did not answer, being busy with the wounded man, whom I quickly detected was not dead. Blood was oozing from his mouth and nostrils, and gurgling in his weasand as he drew his breath, while his eyes were closed, and his shrewish face was more pinched than ever. I ripped open his clothes, and found a wound of entrance and of exit, a rib smashed behind, and clear evidence that the ball had passed through his lung. I stripped

him hastily, got a couple of paddings placed in position, and bound him up securely. The bleeding showed signs of stopping. He began to blow frothy air-bells from his lips, and the froth was pink in colour. There was no use running any risk by shifting him, so I got a cushion placed below his head, laid a cold, wet cloth upon his throat, and let him lie. I could do no more, but had scant hopes of his recovery. Then I turned on Corkran.

"Hand over your pistols," I said sternly.

He threw them sulkily upon the floor.

"They are of no use either to you or me," he growled. "It was my last charge, and I had kept it for myself."

"What made you fire?" I asked, in a voice full of dismay.

"Made me fire? Ecod! and was there not cause? These gentry were beginning to wear an ugly look, and I did not know but that yonder slinker had a knife ready for me. Was I to wait till I felt its point rasping on my backbone and its hilt rattling on my ribs? No, no, Doctor Harry—first come, first served, and ay see you do the serving."

"Well, well," I answered ruefully, "there's no manner of use crying over spilt milk; but what are we to do now?"

"What you might have done at the first," said he—"close the shutters."

"Believe me or not as you will, the simple idea had not previously occurred to me. I now hastened to put his suggestion into action.

"Is there any other port they may force?" asked Corkran.

"No," I replied; "the kitchen skylight is too small to admit a man's body, and the back door is very stout, and fastened by two heavy bars."

"Well and good," said he. "And the window in my chamber is but a slit in the wall. Is that a peep-hole?"

He pointed towards a disc of wood fixed on to the back of one of the shutters, and I nodded. It covered a circular aperture, which may have served an important function once upon a time, the cottage having been built before the wars.

"You had best clap your eye to it then, and keep a bright look-out," he added. "My head is clear now, but I was clean

dazed when I rose. So here's for forty winks ! After all, my hearty, there's nought like the smell of a fight to rouse the devil in one, and make him stir his shanks."

"So it would seem," I replied, as he composed himself to rest in one chair, while I drew another to the window, and, sitting down, took stock of the street through the peep-hole in the shutter. My range of vision was limited, and I saw nothing living except a frightened woman's face peering out above the screen which hid the lower part of an upper window in the house opposite.

I was on the horns of a pretty dilemma. I had sworn to stand by my patient, and now he had kindly presented me with a second, very much worse than himself, down whose shaven chin two trickles of red were coursing from each corner of his mouth and clotting ere they reached the margin of his lower jaw. There was no longer any place for me in Bishop-Solingford. No doubt I might make myself scarce ; but what was I to do with the half-naked man in the chair ? Despite all the troubles into which he had unwittingly plunged me, I had a sneaking fondness for him. I confess there was something taking in the fact that at the first sound of strife he had tumbled out of bed and made for the fray. Crack-pated or not, he was the most interesting human being I had ever encountered, and I did not feel inclined to steal away and leave him, unarmed and helpless, to the tender mercies of the infuriated squire and his myrmidons. And yet, supposing I could carry him with me in my retreat, provided I managed to secure the mare, was I to go wandering about the country with this scarecrow, a fugitive from justice ? True, there was the sea ; but we were far from any port of magnitude, and —and——

My meditations, if they can be so called, were interrupted by the approach of the enemy ; but I perceived at once that they had gained a new recruit, who, like Saul of old, towered head and shoulders above his neighbours.

Jacob Little, the smith, bare-headed, and in his apron, had joined their ranks ; and as they drew closer, I saw he carried his huge sledge-hammer, its handle fastened to his right wrist by a leathern loop.

"Is Saul also among the foe?" was my unspoken thought, but could scarce believe it of him after what had passed.

"Here they come!" I cried; and Corkran rose from the chair and looked out.

"Whew!" he whistled. "What clumsy giant is this? He has as queer a rig as a junk."

In a few words I told him, and expressed the hopes I had entertained that Jacob would prove to be a friend.

"Stap me!" he replied, "but he would be a friend indeed. Saw you ever such a poll? By the Lord! Harry, my lad, I had rather be void of scalp than cursed with a head of hair like bleached Chinese cotton, or flax from a lint steep. Shiver my soul! but he has eyes like a blind, white polecat."

"Maybe," I answered; "but he is the strongest man I have ever seen—ay, or imagined. I witnessed him master a great stallion single-handed."

Corkran did not reply, but remained with his eye glued to the peep-hole.

"They be mortal scared," he said presently; and with that he stuck the muzzle of one of his unloaded pistols through the aperture, and then laughed aloud; for, as he told me, they had all run at sight of it, save the commodore and the junk—for so he called the squire and the blacksmith.

"There are but two spunky craft amongst the lot," he said, withdrawing his eye from the hole; "but that's a fearsome weapon the junk carries by a landyard."

I took his place, and watched the two men talking together. A third, the squire's watchman, joined them, and I noted that he carried a musket. Things were indeed becoming very serious. Although I had not informed Corkran, my own pistols, loaded and primed, lay locked up in my strong-box, but I was anxious to avoid further bloodshed. Still, the man in me rebelled against tame submission. I had more than a measure of right upon my side, and was not to blame for the shooting of Abel Pike. Consequently I hardened my heart, and resolved to defy them. By this time the crowd had gathered again, and I saw the squire point with his sword towards the house. His musketeer fell on

one knee, and trained his weapon on the window ; and Jacob, in whom I was sore disappointed, separated from the rest, and I knew that, as Abel Pike had done, he was creeping up the street close to the house wall. There was some skill in their dispositions ; for if one leaned out to fire at the smith, he would be at the mercy of the musketeer, who would, in all probability, fire, did he see as much as a bell-mouth peeping from out the shutter.

The smith's intention was soon evident. I could not bring myself to produce my pistols and send a pellet into him, though not through fear of the armed man in the street, and so he gained the door unharmed, then, stepping a couple of paces backward, he swung the hammer above his head. He was, beyond a doubt, a very daring fellow, for he ran risk both from pistol and musket, and presented a mark which would be difficult to miss. But ere his battering ram could descend on the stout timber I cried his name through the hole in the shutter. He paused in his stroke and turned in my direction, blinking and surprised.

"Is that you, my doctor?" he said.

"Why, yes," I answered joyfully ; "what mean you by trying to ding my house down about my ears in this uncivil manner?"

He positively grew distressed.

"God be my witness," he said earnestly, "that I knew not you lived here. They came and told me that two low fellows had taken possession of one of the squire's cottages, and they asked me to break in upon them."

"And probably told you they were unarmed?"

"Even so, with the exception of a knife or two—oh yes, they mentioned knives."

"Why, man," I whispered, for he had come closer, "we have had to shoot one of the rascals already."

"Do you tell me?" he rejoined in wonder, his slow brains gradually taking in my meaning.

At that moment the squire shouted out :

"Fall to, Master Jacob, fall to ! What game are you at there?"

"You will presently see," Jacob called back to him, and then said softly, "Open the shutters, doctor, my hammer prefers wooden heads to wooden doors to-day."

"The smith's with us," I cried to Corkran, as I made haste to obey.

"Split me ! then," was his answer, "if we be not a trio !"

In climbed Jacob like some vast sprawling frog, and as the shutters were closed again a cry of chagrin and wrath went up from the squire's party.

"God bless you, Jacob !" I said heartily, "and——"

"Come aboard to join, my hearty ?" cried Corkran. "Doctor Harry, are we not to splice the mainbrace over this new messmate ?"

"What ?" I asked.

"Ecod !" said he, "a thimbleful of cognac would but be fitting to the occasion."

"No, no, captain," I replied ; "remember, you are still my patient, and we may yet need all our brandy."

"Right, my admiral !" was his sole rejoinder. "But stap my vitals ! this gentleman is scarce human."

It was ludicrous to see the two of them together : the one the impersonation of wickedness and war, and the other a type of simplicity and the peaceful trades, at least, so it appeared to me, though to be sure there was a spice of quiet wit and humour about the smith's sayings and doings.

"Have a care," I contrived to whisper in Corkran's ear, and he winked, to show that he comprehended my meaning. It would not do to offend a third, and that, to write like an Irishman, the biggest third of the garrison. Thus reinforced, I felt much more confident of the immediate future, though it was distinctly unpleasant to be mewed up in my own dwelling.

The musketeer did not draw trigger on us, and from my point of vantage I watched the crowd, which presently dispersed. The squire had evidently hatched some fresh plan. I asked Jacob, who was fairly puzzled at the coxswain's appearance, to take his stand on a chair in the sick-chamber and keep a watch through the slit for any demonstration directed at the back of the house. Corkran, who began to look jaded and spent, sat in the window chair, and I attended to Abel Pike. He was better, though still unconscious. The bleeding had ceased, and the bandages had not shifted, so I did not disturb him.

Thus we watched and waited till nightfall, and though the smith reported that he had seen two men, evidently on sentry-go, there was no other sign of the enemy. We had eaten in turn, though the sailor was sick in the stomach, and refused solid food; but as it grew dark we gathered round the table and the candles in the front room. It was cold now that a few jagged pieces of glass and broken framework guarded by the shutters was all that was left of my trim window, but a roaring fire made some amends and it was unlikely we would be disturbed that night at least. Jacob Little had told me that he had heard the chirurgion proposing to send for the soldiery, there being a garrison of dragoons quartered at the town nearest us on the Great North Road, and I considered it very likely that his proposal had been followed. If so, they would be here on the morrow, and we would not stand a chance.

"We must clear out before daybreak," I cried. "Fortunately the night is dark."

"Yes," nodded the smith, "and it begins to snow."

"Ugh!" exclaimed Corkran; "and whither are we bound, my masters?"

He had removed the cloth from his head and got him into one of my undervests and coats, both too big for him, while I had supplied him also with hosen and stout shoes. A broad leathern belt replaced the red waistband, which was now wound round his neck, and over his own breeches he had drawn a pair of mine, much soiled and worn, but received with a profusion of thanks and odd remarks. Though scarcely such an outrageous figure, he presented a sufficiently startling appearance, and the bauble once more glittered like a beast's eye in his beard. Jacob, I could see, distrusted him and viewed him askance, while I merely marvelled at his hardihood and the grit which kept him on his feet when he looked fitter for his bed.

"Hist!" he added suddenly, and then in a whisper, "ar't sure our friend with the hole in him cannot hear?"

I went and looked, testing his eye wink with my finger.

"Certain," I replied; "he is still unconscious."

"Then," said Corkran, taking the chart from his locket, "what

The Song of the Smith

101

did I tell you, Doctor Harry? Ho, ho! my master, 'tis your fate; come you must, and see you bring your tome there along with you."

I have in me, as the reader, granted there be one, has perchance perceived, a certain vein of caution,—mayhap my legacy from a Scots ancestor who came south with their King James, that source of trouble and contention, but I have also something of the fatalist, and in extremities I am apt to act on the spur of the moment. I did so now, though not till the sailor had once more recounted the glories and dangers of the enterprise.

"This is no idle quest," said he, "no delving for Spanish doubloons on a bare island with land crabs and stinking guano, no steering betwixt ice floes and grubbing amongst frozen snow for scurvy grass. We seek the sun, my lad, and the flowers, and broad rivers, and fair plains, and mighty forests. The land teems with game, the natives, save the Abatwa, are the kindest sons of Ham on earth. I tell you it is a continent, a mighty continent, an escapade fit for kings and armies, and with gold at the end of it, and, mayhap," here he winked prodigiously, "a princess as well. Yea or nay, for the second time, Doctor Harry,—for the second and last time?"

"Have with you!" I answered hotly, seeing no prospect of either getting there or anywhere else.

"Swear to me!" he cried, exultant.

"You have my word, hang you!" I said, half angry at myself, "and that is as good as any bond or oath."

"By Daddy Neptune!" he answered, "I do believe it, and will take it as such."

All this time he had paid no attention to Jacob Little, who gazed from him to me with the kindest of unmeaning grins as if to say, "These be two very funny fellows, but their talk is utterly beyond me."

Now, however, Corkran rounded on him.

"And you, my hop o' thumb, are you also for the sea? I opine there will be enough treasure for the three of us."

Now Jacob was a trifle slow of hearing.

"Eh?" he queried.

"Eh?" mimicked the mariner, who was now excited, "would you waste your breath? Come, sir, you have heard me speak of this country of gold. I do you the honour to ask you to accompany us in the state visit we propose paying to his Majesty of that realm."

His air was magnificent. Worthy Jacob looked a trifle bewildered, and no wonder.

"You mistake," he said at length, shielding his eyes from the candlelight; "I deal in the baser metals."

"Ho, ho!" laughed Corkran, "stap me! if he is not a wit, Doctor Harry, our junk is pierced for guns and can hit back right merrily. So you are wedded to your trade," he said, "a sorry business, ecod! Doctor Harry, I prithee lend me a sheet of paper, a quill, and a dash of ink, and it's Corkran will write you the life of a smith."

Marvelling greatly, I brought him the requisites. He squared himself to the task, his head all on one side and a tuft of his wig hair falling over one eye and having to be constantly thrown back.

Splutter, splutter! he wrote with a magnificent flourish and at a surprising rate, making at the same time a most filthy mess as he showered inkdrops around him.

In ten minutes or so he had finished, and was reading over what he had set down. Then he dived into one of the pockets of my waistcoat, which he was wearing, and produced therefrom a thin reed of metal which he must have transferred to it from his own clothes. This he struck on the table edge and it vibrated, giving forth a humming note. Again he tapped on the wood and held it to his unharmed ear. The pitch was higher, and he smiled to himself and threw back his head. Then without so much as by your leave, he began to sing. Not as he had done that first night. True, there came, as before, the harsh sound in his wind-pipe, but his voice, otherwise, was more melodious, and expressed better the meaning of his words. The first verse was set to a rapid, tripping measure, with a deep-throated chorus at the end of it; that of the second was sad and slow; but the cadence of the third was weird, of an intense melancholy, and produced

The Song of the Smith

103

a most peculiar effect upon us who listened without protest, for this was what he voiced. These are the words of the Song of the Smith as Corkran wrote and sang them :

A right merry man was the blacksmith bold,
Though he boasted him not of silver or gold,
But his arm was strong and his eye was sure ;
What recked he then though ever so poor ?
So long as his bellows were tough and sound
His hammer from anvil did oft rebound,
And many's the horse and many's the mare
That Vulcan fitted with one or two pair ;
For clinkety clink, and clinkety clang,
A right merry song his hammer sang.

A weary old man is the blacksmith grey,
And he struggleth often to pay his way,
For his arm is weak and his eye is dim,
And poverty meaneth a grave for him.
Alack ! his bellows are all to mend,
And soon his hammer its song must end,
For never a horse and never a mare
Falls to the feeble old blacksmith's share ;
And clink, clink, clink, and clink, clink, clong,
A weary affair is his hammer's song.

A silent old man is the blacksmith now,
And his poverty troubleth him not, I trow,
For his arm is stiff, and his eye is sunk,
And he heareth no longer the clinkety clunk.
The hammer's song is muffled and rude
As it driveth the nails through the coffin wood,
While there's never a horse, and never a mare,
Can drag the old smith from his churchyard lair.
And ding, dong, ding, and dong, ding, dong,
The death-bell must toll the hammer's song.

It was, perhaps, but rude verse, though it expressed his meaning, yet, sung as Corkran sang it, even I was stirred. I could see Jacob's powerful figure in the heyday of his youth and strength. I could see him old and bent and worn, with the rheumy eyes, and the drop at the nose, and the palsied hands of the aged ; ay,

and I could see him also, still and stiff and sunken ; and I seemed to hear the dull, unmusical, matter-of-fact thuds of a hammer upon coffin nails as they pinned the lid to the body of the chest. There was something of devilish cunning in all this, something I could scarcely fathom, and if the effect on my nerves was marked, Jacob Little was even more impressed.

Corkran could give a wonderful metallic clang to his voice, and where he imitated the strokes on the anvil one could well-nigh hear the resounding blows of a sledge hammer in the first verse ; in the second, the feeble tinklings at which he hinted, and in the third the sonorous tones of a heavy, slow-tolling bell.

The smith's face flushed and worked, grew long and distressed, and then full of pity and sympathy as he listened to the tale of the three phases of his career. Indeed, at the end, his head was sunk in his hands, and I am not certain but that he was blinking the moisture out of his blind eyes.

"Wonderful !" he said at length. "Captain Corkran, you are an amazing man !"

"Ay, ay," replied the latter gruffly, a little affected, I think, by his own singing, for his nature was emotional ; "but are you for that amazing man's company, or are you not, sir ?"

Jacob shook his head.

"I know nothing of the sea," he said, "and I have no greed of gold."

"But I will tell you what you have, sir," cried Corkran, who seemed angered at his refusal, "you have a need of brains, sir, of brains ! Split me ! if I do not change my song to run, how think you, Master Smith ? why—

Blinkety, blink, blinkety, blunk,
Two blind eyes in a white head sunk."

He craned forward his neck as he spoke and delivered this dastardly insult with a vehement malignity. I could not conceive his object, unless it were to rouse the phlegmatic man before him, and, if so, he succeeded.

Jacob, who seemed quite willing to agree with him as he spoke of lack of brains, started as though stung when Corkran

The Song of the Smith

105

threw this insane gibe at him. He pushed back his chair and sprang clumsily to his feet. His eyes dilated, and it was then I noted they were of a very pale blue colour, and not pink, as I had fancied; he clenched his huge fists, and as I rose to stop him he rushed at Corkran like some infuriated bull. That worthy, with whom I was disgusted, never stirred a muscle, but sat and grinned evilly up at the man he had goaded to a fury.

If he had tried to escape or defend himself Jacob would have pounded him to a jelly; but this impassiveness disconcerted the smith, who stood towering above him, choking and inarticulate with rage, and yet too much of a gentleman to strike a thing which made no effort to defend itself.

In after-days the old sea-dog explained that he was determined to set Jacob's sluggish blood in motion, and to taunt him with stupidity and cowardice, for he saw that the smith would prove a useful ally in his schemes. Had his first means of defence failed him, he told us that he had meant to play the same trick he had played, without success, on me—to have whipped off his wig and scared Jacob's wits out of him.

"My friend," said Jacob, when he was so informed, "it is well for you that I stopped short when I did, for I can at no time see very well in any kind of light, and that evening I could scarce see at all."

It was true. The smith was both blind and deaf in his consuming wrath, and I do not think he even heard my protests or saw me as I ran in between them. Indeed, he might probably have crushed me in place of Corkran had there not at that moment come a muffled but incessant tapping at the shutter.

CHAPTER IX

BOUND FOR BANTAM

WITH some difficulty I dragged Jacob back to his seat, besought him to be quiet, and in the same breath roundly rated Corkran, and swore I would have no such conduct under my roof. What, however, was the use of storming at a man who wore a most penitent air, solemnly shook his head, and declared I was perfectly in the right, while his eyes were yet dancing in his head with amusement and wickedness? He was incomprehensible, this old rip, and actually began complimenting the smith on the spirit he had shown, after we had hurriedly arranged that I should ascertain whether or no some one was signalling to us.

"I did but test you a trifle roughly," he said, "but on ship-board we are apt to forget our gentility and bandy jests which sour on a landsman's stomach. I ask your pardon, my friend." He was again the gentleman.

I heard no more, but leaving them to settle matters amicably, I went over to the window and rapped on my side of the shutter.

The tapping ceased.

"Who is there?" I called out softly, and slid back the covering of the eyelet.

"Harry, my lad, is that you?" whispered a voice I recognised as the vicar's.

"Master Spetticue!" I exclaimed, "what brings you here?"

"Hush!" he said. "I come at great risk to warn you. They have sent for the dragoons, and you must be gone ere morning."

"You are a good friend," said I; "but what sort of a night is it?"

"Exceeding dirty," he replied, "as black as my coat, and snowing heavily. They have a watch set in the house opposite, and I have had to creep along close to the house walls, and crawl, crawl on the snow, whenever I passed a lighted window."

The idea of the Rev. Hilary playing such pranks tickled me, but I was touched by the goodness of his heart.

"You need not fear for me," I said; "ere morning I'll be far on the road."

He groaned.

"What is my poor Amelia to do without you?" he said.

"Tut, man!" I answered, "she is surely sufficiently versed in such matters to——"

"I must go," he whispered, interrupting me, "there is some one coming down the street with a lantern. Write me, doctor—. Good-bye, and may God bless you!"

His plump hand was pushed through the peep-hole, and was withdrawn the moment after I had pressed it. With another groan the worthy parson was gone, leaving me more moved than I had thought possible, and half averse to quit the village where I had one such kindly friend.

There could be no doubt, however, that the sooner we got underway the better. After listening for a short space, during which I heard nothing further, I returned to my companions and found peace restored, or, at the worst, a kind of armed neutrality in force. I told them what I had heard, and they agreed with me that it would be wise to set out at once, especially as the heavy snowfall would serve to mask our movements. It was not probable that the sentinels at the back of the house found the business much to their liking, and their vigilance might be eluded. We made our plans hastily, but with due caution.

Whether Abel Pike died or not the matter meant a hanging for Corkran, were he caught, and transportation, or even a similar fate, for me. The smith would certainly suffer imprisonment, so that none of us felt our necks far from the noose. Poor Jacob had decided to throw in his lot with us for the nonce. Indeed, he had no other choice left him, even though it meant abandoning

a small store of money he kept in the loft above the smithy, for we could not run the risk of letting him go to fetch it.

The whole affair seemed so paltry and unnecessary that it was hard to conceive we were really in danger of our lives, and yet, that proof might not be lacking, there was the wounded man in the corner, moaning uneasily and apparently coming to his senses. Corkran, for all his vigour, was still weak, and I decided that we must make for the stabling-shed, saddle the mare, and mount him on her back. In this they concurred, and I could see that the coxswain was heartily glad to hear that he would have a horse at his disposal, though he took it as a matter of course.

I had enough to do. First, I fetched a hat for the smith, which covered very little of his crown till it was crushed out of shape, and the saddle-bags being fortunately in the house, I set to work to pack food and drink, cautioning Corkran regarding the latter. I got out my pistols, drew their charges, cleaned and loaded them, and supplied the coxswain with powder and shot for his barkers, which luckily were of a similar bore. This, I think, gave him more delight than anything else, for he showed no compunction at having let daylight into Abel Pike, and thrust his weapon into his belt with an air of bravado which consorted poorly with the drawn, haggard look on his face. I had an old cloak and a wrap-rascal, so I served Jacob with the one and Corkran with the second, feeling the latter was well bestowed and for once deserved its name. The volume on fevers I secured in a piece of sacking and placed in a bundle of odds and ends, such as my instruments for phlebotomy and a few useful drugs which I gathered together. It was only then I felt the wrench at leaving all my well-thumbed stock of vellum, my treasure trove of learning and information behind me; but it was impossible to take the books, and I rested content with a pocket Bible which had been my mother's—a strange selection surely, but every man has his soft moments, and God knows there was a lump in my throat as I looked around me at the familiar though humble room.

I had picked up several of the classics when in Leyden, for example, the works in part of Pliny, Strabo, and Herodotus, a well-preserved Tacitus in folio, and a curious collection of manu-

scripts dealing with Upper Egypt and the Nile. Further, my books on medicine were my pride, some having excellent woodcuts and engravings, and one, printed in Italian, a wonderful set of runic illustrations, done most cunningly in colour. It cut me to the heart to leave all this store, but there was no alternative. Sitting down, I penned a letter to the vicar, beseeching him to give them house room, and leaving him my other belongings and sufficient sums to pay Dame Pottinger (who, poor soul, must have been terrified at all this upturning), and to fee my worthy stableman. I sprinkled the sand over the wet ink, folded and sealed the directions, and then on second thoughts wrote out a statement of the whole unfortunate affair, and made Corkran and Jacob Little witness my signature. Both could write, but the smith's penmanship was of the feeblest, and he smeared the ink on the point of his nose when peering at his work of art.

At last we were accoutred for the road, but, before leaving, Jacob and I raised Abel Pike and bestowed him on the box-bed, where I made him as comfortable as might be, and placed a cup of milk conveniently near him, for I knew he would wake thirsty, if he woke at all.

Everything was at length ready, and the others awaited me in the little kitchen at the back. I took a silent farewell of my old room, my hearthstone, the cheery fire, my books, the sturdy table, my padded chair. I was like one in a dream. True, I had kicked against my dull life, but when it came to striking out afresh and facing the unknown with the hounds of justice at my heels, I felt depressed and miserable. Shabby though the place was, it had been my home, and now a wanderer's life was in store for me, and no doubt there would be a price upon my head. My solitary consolation was that I was not to blame, unless, indeed, this misfortune was sent as a judgment for my repinings.

Remember, dear reader, I was not a youth, and routine sets its mark on a man and meshes his soul as much as sin, even though he may have no human ties. Not that I am ashamed of my weakness. After all, it was not cowardly, though could I have gazed into the future I do not say but that sheer fright might have gripped me as I stood and said adieu to my ancient, silent friends.

Leaving the candles burning, I lit a lantern and joined my companions in the kitchen, carefully closing the door which opened into it from the passage, so that when we passed out into the garden no ray of light might warn those watching the house that any attempt at escape was in progress.

"Have you everything?" I asked, raising the lantern and surveying the two figures before me, Jacob, enormous in the cloak, and Corkran a shapeless mass in the folds of the wrap-rascal.

They nodded, and it was then I saw that the smith had his beloved hammer with him. It was a curious thing to drag about the country, but would prove a most formidable weapon at close quarters, especially as it had a very lengthy handle of tough wood. I could not then foresee that it and the book of Rhazes the Arabian were perhaps the most valuable of our effects.

Extinguishing the candle in the lantern we drew back the bars from the outer door, shot back the lock, which, to my excited brain, appeared to make an appalling noise, and then, as I alone knew the way to the stable, I was the first to pass out into the night.

"Exceeding dirty," the vicar had said, and he was not far wrong. The blackness was intense, it was as if we were at the bottom of some pit below ground, but the air was full of snow. Great flakes, whose whiteness was not visible, were falling so thickly that it seemed a wonder they did not form one continuous sheet. To me it appeared as though there could scarce be room enough to provide a space between the components of such a multitude. There was little wind, and hence the cold, though sharp, was not intense. What chiefly struck me about that night was its utter loneliness.

The others followed me, and we closed the door behind us, putting it on the latch. Then keeping close to the wall of the cottage we stole cautiously along, seeing nothing but a whitish glimmer on the ground and the occasional vague shape of a snowflake, hearing nothing but the soft thud of our own footsteps and the faint sound of our own breathing. I carried my bundle and one of the saddle-bags, the other being in Jacob's charge, together with the provender. As for Corkran, he had enough to do to

Bound for Bantam

III

stumble along himself. I came near losing my way, though we had not far to go, but luckily I blundered on the edge of the barn of which the stable formed a part.

Groping by the side of the wooden building we arrived at the door, half expecting to find a guard placed over it, but finding none. I had the key, and was speedily inside, and had lit the lantern. The shed was tenantless save for my Nancy, who whimpered softly as I came up to her. It seemed a black shame to take the poor beast out of her stall on such a night, but there was no help for it, and quickly saddling, girthing, and bridling her I led her forth, after strapping on the saddle-bags, fastening her nose-bag to the pommel, and being careful to take also several feeds of corn in a receptacle of soft leather, in shape like a bladder, which I used for the purpose. The mare was accustomed to night work, but she did not fancy facing the snow. For all that, like the kindly animal she was, she rubbed her soft nose against my sleeve, and suffered Corkran to be hoisted on her back, where he crouched a huddled heap of swathings, after commenting quaintly on the novelty of his craft.

Then we set out upon our travels, myself at the bridle, Jacob at the mare's tail, and the silent, merciful snow obliterating all traces of our midnight flight.

It would serve no purpose to recount step by step the stages of our journey, the hardships we encountered, the miseries we endured. At first I was for visiting one of the outlying farms and purchasing a cart, but fearing lest such an action should give the dragoons an inkling of the direction in which we had gone, I abandoned the idea, and we pushed steadily southwards. London was our goal, for in its labyrinth of streets and lanes lay our best chance of safety, and Corkran knew a place hard by the river where we could lie *perdu*.

The smith stuck to us, for he and I grew very friendly, though he was still averse to the sailor's company. Corkran, however, with his withered skin nipped by the cold and his thin blood chilled and sluggish, was very peaceable, remaining drowsy and half stupefied the whole week it took us to reach the capital. We avoided villages and put up at isolated farms, though more

than once we had to camp in the open, and then, indeed, Corkran's past experiences were of value, for he had a dozen methods of securing comfort and all kind of devices for procuring warmth and shelter, and this despite his lassitude.

My store of money was not large, but it sufficed, and just before reaching the city I parted with Nancy, thereby filling my purse, but leaving my heart with another void in it, for many a lonely hour had the mare and I spent in each other's company. Guided by Corkran, who shook off his lethargy at the sight of bricks and mortar, we made our way through the pebble-paved streets to the north bank of the Thames, and there in the precinct of St. Catherine which, whatever it now may do, did not then stretch to within a mile of Limehouse, in that noisy, squalid quarter of the busy metropolis, we found a refuge.

There was no word of our pursuers, but it was impossible to be certain if we were free of them. No doubt Master Fairfax, being London bred and knowing the city's reputation, would at once suspect us of having gone thither, so that as soon as the roads were once more open the hue and cry might be hot foot after us. Still, we had done well so far, and though our lodging was comfortless it was moderately clean, which compensated us in some measure for having to stay indoors. The weather changed and Corkran recovered. Nothing would keep him in the house.

The sight of the broad river with its wherries, the tilt-boat running up-stream on the tide from Greenwich to Westminster with its load of passengers, the tall ships swinging to their hawsers in the Pool, with sails clewed under the gaskets, or loosed in snowy bellying clouds as the barques glided seawards to the choruses of mariners, rendered him strangely restless. The whole quarter reeked of foreign lands. A whiff of tar greeted your nostrils and your ears were assailed by the cries of watermen passing coarse jests or the time of day with one another. Barges laden above the gunwales with every manner of merchandise unloaded at the wharves, and porters staggered under the weight of bales and casks, stamped and strong-smelling, which they haled to the warehouses, or sweated as they rolled wayward barrels and bulging puncheons. Jovial mariners, with rings in their ear-lobes and the jingle of

coin in their pockets, reeled through the narrow lanes, squirting out the brown juice of cheek-stuffing quids and arm in arm with frowsy, petticoated Polls, whose prey they were. A stately merchant, all cane and ruffles and seals, would hail a boat and embark with much pomp and circumstance for one of his craft lying at anchorage, or soundly rate some defaulting clerk with thin chest and spindle shanks, a pitiable spectacle in this place of sun-browned men. I could see it all from the window, and it fascinated me. I knew a little of London, but this was a new side to its life, and conjured up visions such as Corkran had described.

Jacob, unused to being cooped up and deprived of exercise, was miserable; but the coxswain, finding his weak point, had so imbued him with an idea of the strength and agility of the natives of Terra de Natal that he was anxious to try conclusions with them, being admirably simple, and so had agreed to ship with us. Indeed, he was bewildered at all the bustle and confusion, and on the rare occasions on which he ventured out was ever blundering blindly into people on the street, who, however, after one glance at him were only too willing to admit the fault lay with them.

At night it was different, but I never tired of watching the lights flash into being at foretops, from side ports, in poop lanterns, and from cabin windows. The wavy yellow streaks dipped into the blackness of the river, over which would drift the tinkle of squeaky fiddle scrapings and the sound of voices singing.

At last I felt that I had done wisely to quit my country grave and to be once more in touch with the great world, at length I ceased to regret the sudden and unlooked-for change. So the time sped, with never a glimpse of our pursuers. I did not write Master Spetticue, for obvious reasons, and amused myself with the treatise of Rhazes, to which previously I had paid scant attention. Just, however, as this hole and corner game was becoming irksome, Corkran, who had been busy making inquiries, returned one day at dusk with the tidings that on the morrow we were to sail, as he had taken passage for the two of us, at the expense of many a good penny in my purse, aboard a stout ship bound for Bantam.

CHAPTER X

ABOARD THE "KITTIWAKE"

"BANTAM," said I, with a vague idea that the place was in the Eastern Indies or Batavia, though, as no doubt the reader well knows, it is really situate in the island of Java, "but how will that help us?"

"Hark to the land lubber!" chuckled Corkram; "is any craft, however well found, to compass eight months' voyage without the cable scraping through the hawse hole? Learn, then, that the *Kittiwake*, for so she is called, will touch either at the Bay of Saint Helena, or at the Cape itself."

"Saint Helena," I repeated, "is there not some island of that name?"

"Right, my great geographer, there is such a bare black rock plump in mid-ocean, but the bay of which I speak is on the mainland, and is an inhospitable spot at that. Howbeit, 'tis easy to get a ship thence to Table Bay, and thereafter we must even trust to luck and our own wits if we are to make the wooded promontory and the great lagoon."

Now that we were face to face with the adventure I had my misgivings, but having passed my word I would not turn back, and, moreover, felt a trifle reckless and even intent upon the enterprise.

It seemed to me a very solemn and momentous thing to undertake so long a voyage, and especially to set out upon such a mad quest, and I marvelled at Corkran, who looked forward with relish to the prospect and appeared less perturbed than if a fly

had lit upon his nose. As for Jacob, he was aghast at the thought of such a journey, but he resolved to stick by me, and soon resumed his usual phlegmatic demeanour, though somewhat concerned as to the question of victuals aboard this *Kittiwake*.

Corkran informed us that the vessel lay in the Pool with the Blue Peter at her fore, and, having nearly completed her lading, would drop down the river on the morrow with the ebb tide and run round to the Downs, where she would meet her convoy down Channel.

"I have shipped myself," said he, "as under-boatswain, a downcome, I admit, but when a sailor is on his beam-ends he is glad of anything which will set him on an even keel, and split me if I be proud-stomached!"

I could have wished that he had been a passenger, like Jacob and myself; but he vowed that such a rôle would never suit him, and that he would quarrel with the skipper in a week.

"Now," said he, "I will be aboard before you, but I have fallen in with some old cronies, and, stap me! if we do not make a night of it. They are free-fisted, if I be poor as a ship's rat. Here is a list of a few necessities which you will do well to lay in to-morrow in the morning, and may buy at the ship chandler's shop in Thames Street, which has the sign of a frigate, and is kept by an ugly, circumcised son of a Jew, who will do his best to fleece you, so beware."

With that he was gone, but returned to tell us to make sure of meeting the ship's jolly-boat, which would be lying at the landing-stage above the Tower wharf, and in which we should embark not later than noon. I implored him to stay with us, fearful lest he should get into mischief. Many things might befall him, for getting drunk, of which there was every probability, he might miss the *Kittiwake* altogether, or, according to his own narration, he might be nabbed by the pressmen, or knifed in a quarrel, or smothered in the river mud. We had supped full of his horrors the past few evenings, and it was easy to imagine the worst, particularly as his state of health was none of the best, although he had so far recovered with truly

marvellous celerity considering his years and the severity of his illness. The mere exhaustion consequent upon exposure and privation such as had prostrated him, is howbeit a very different thing from some disease which fastens on the vitals and surely saps the strength.

He merely laughed at me, asked who had made me his wet nurse, and swaggered off on his unholy pleasures, leaving me again depressed.

From the window I watched night settle on the scene, and wondered which of the many craft was the *Kittiwake*, and saw the shadows gather over the Surrey fields and shroud the bosom of the swirling river.

"Was this," I asked myself, and with some reason, "the last night I was to spend in England?"

So many thoughts crowded in on me in the darkness that had it not been for my rash promise and the fear of a worse fate I verily believe I would never have set foot on planking. As it was, the day found me sleepless and jaded, while Jacob had slumbered like a child and snorted like one of those unwieldy sea-cows which it has been my lot to watch and marvel at.

Corkran's list was a strange one. By his direction I purchased a hanger, a couple of muskets, and a supply of powder and shot, three hatchets, a few delicacies, such as a jar of preserves and conserved ginger, and a variety of dried fruits, a hat for Jacob and one for myself, a sufficiency of underwear and some linen of doubtful texture, a pair of stout shoes, and other odds and ends which I confess I have forgotten. I know, however, that my purse contents had shrunk to vanishing point when I had concluded, even though for once I blessed my Scots ancestor for a certain capacity I have in driving bargains, and was tongue-tired with haggling over prices. The Jew's shop was a wonderful place, stored with every conceivable article, and blessed with a collection of odours which I have never found surpassed.

We hired a boy to carry some of our belongings, and, having settled with the woman who kept the lodgings, found ourselves betimes at the appointed place. The boat was there, as we learned upon inquiry, and in charge of her was a coarse man of

sufficiently villainous appearance, who, though he evidently expected us, growled at sight of our burdens, but with some show of politeness pointed out the *Kittiwake*, on whose yards the sailors were already busy, while her head sails were flapping at the ropes. Of all the vessels in the Pool she was the one to take the eye. Not from her size, for her tonnage, I fancied, was nothing great, but by reason of the sheer of her cutwater, the run of her long, black sides, the upward sweep of her counter, her low poop, and the rake of her masts. Even to my eyes she looked a fast ship and was evidently well armed, showing four guns of a side peeping from square ports, which broke the continuity of the broad yellow streak that traversed her hull below the bulwarks.

We took our places in the boat's stern, Jacob negotiating the thwarts with very cautious steps, and, as usual, filling the few onlookers with astonishment, while the pock-marked tarpaulin shouted advice at him, quaked for fear of an upset, and made sundry remarks on the length and bulk of his legs. I thought it well to take no notice of such a vulgar fellow, while Jacob merely blinked impassively at him. The smith would have been a puzzle to any one. His clothes were those of his trade, though he carried his apron done up into a bundle, in which, as I knew, his hammer was concealed. On his head, however, he wore a very decent laced hat, the largest in the Jew's shop, while on his own account, and much to my amusement, for he was like a child with a gew-gaw, he had purchased a scarf of a light blue colour, which contrasted strangely with his jacket of buff cloth and jerkin lined with leather, though, as he forced me to confess, it formed an admirable foil to his complexion.

As soon as the crew of four appeared, two of them at least the worse for liquor, we pushed off, and, describing a semicircle, ran alongside the vessel. She had a ladder of rope and wood, by which we boarded her and so reached the quarterdeck, a couple of the seamen following with our effects. On gaining the poop we were greeted by a bearded and sallow-faced man, who touched his hat and received us civilly, though with a very long-winded speech. He was the first mate, and explained with a

plethora of high-sounding words, that Captain Scudamore was below with the supercargo, but would make our acquaintance later.

Calling a negro lad, whose ears he cuffed for no apparent reason, he bade him conduct us to our cabin, which we found to be a small and stuffy hole with a side port and two bunks. Knowing the anatomy of ships I was not surprised, but Jacob speedily discovered that his bed was at least a yard too short for him and was dismayed in consequence. As a matter of fact he had to take up his quarters on the floor, much to the entertainment of an army of cockroaches, as we discovered in due course. We did our best to be cheerful, bestowed our properties securely, the more so as the door was furnished with lock and key, and returned again upon deck to look about us.

There could be no doubt but that the *Kittiwake* was a fine vessel. Her deck, which was flush forward of the poop, ran in a curving sweep to the bitts of the bowsprit, the latter being long, high-cocked, and very thick at the root. The bulwarks were lofty, and the deck works adorned by white paint, with the exception of a green caboose just abaft the main mast. There was little carving or ornament about the ship, but she looked well-found and speedy, something like a dark sleuthhound yet held in leash. She squatted low in the water, and once on board one could mark how beamy she was, despite her elegance. All was bustle and activity. From a barge alongside barrels were being slung up one at a time, the sails were being shaken loose, and there came the sound of stamping feet and a low-pitched song as some lusty Jacks tailed on to one of the jib ropes in the bows.

A soft breeze was stealing down river, and looking over the side I could see that the tide had turned. The view from the deck was passing fair, the city sweeping in a crescent along the northern bank, St. Paul's towering high over all, the bridge away above us, the little huddle of houses on the Surrey side, the broad reaches below, and the level tree-fringed fields stretching afar to blend with the dull, grey sky.

I was more concerned, however, about Corkran than about the

prospect. There was no sign of that worthy, and eventually I made bold to address the first mate on the subject. He was a very colourless individual with sandy hair, a sandy face, and watery eyes in which the coloured portions were not well differentiated from the rest, being a pale, smudged blue. His whole face looked as though it had been scoured by sea breezes, and lashed by rain and spray till all its original hues had faded and blended into a prevailing whitish-brown like the tint of a weather-beaten signboard. He displayed an untidy beard, but his upper lip was shaven, though stubbly. It was also of an extreme depth, and dipped down behind its hair-decked fellow, so that the mouth was such as one observes in a sulky, frightened child.

"May I ask, sir," said I, "if your under-boatswain, he who secured our passage for us, has yet come on board?"

The man straightened himself, visibly shifted a huge quid from one cheek to another, and fixed me with a vacant gaze.

"Sir," said he, "I perceive no reason why you may not interrogate Barney Dickenson concerning such an occurrence."

I perceived, as indeed his greeting had led me to suspect, that this salt fancied himself a bit of a wag, though his countenance was as solemn as an owl's.

I bowed, therefore, and——

"Has Master Dickenson any reason which would prevent him replying?" I asked.

"In the positive, yea and verily," said he, "in the negative, why no, I think not."

His voice had a sanctimonious drawl, and as he spoke his upper lip rose and fell like a meat chopper, clapping finally into its place, and by its peculiar impact with the lower, intensifying all his labials, so that his p's sounded double, and each v like the letter b. There was something fascinating in its movements, and I saw Jacob watching it with his eager, peering gaze, and following it up and down with his blind eyes. I recollect that I had to suppress a shout of laughter, for there was something irresistibly amusing in the scene.

"I gather, then, that Nicholas Corkran has not so far joined the ship's company," I said.

"If such be the cognomen of the under-bosun," he replied, "your cogitations have directed you to a proper conclusion, your gatherings, sir, have not been in vain."

I looked to see if the fellow was taking a liberty with me, but he presented a front of the utmost gravity and seriousness.

"Is there any likelihood of his coming soon?" I asked, anxiously enough.

"Celerity," said the pedantic idiot, "will indeed be necessary, for we elevate the anchor in the next quinquennium of minutes. Your pardon," he added, snatched up a speaking trumpet which stood on the ledge of the bulwarks, and bellowed an order to some sailors who were laying out on the fore yard. It was short and to the point. Master Dickenson evidently reserved his peculiarities of speech for private converse. I could have wished that it had been the other way about.

Despairing of getting any satisfactory information out of him, I withdrew, perplexed and uneasy. My fears had been realised, something had detained our fellow fugitive. I wondered if he had been pounced upon by our pursuers, and if they would discover our retreat. I scanned the shore, but the minutes passed and no boat came towards us from the wharf. What were we to do without the old shell back? What was to become of us? We would soon be at sea in one sense, and all at sea in another, for we were like fish out of water on shipboard, and were ignorant as babes of the regions whither we were bound. In my distress I confided in Jacob, but he was placid as ever.

"What matter, doctor?" said he, "we be men, not children, and for my part I think we are well rid of a rogue."

At times, I must confess, the smith irritated me, he was so dull in the uptake, and so lacking in imagination. Thereby, however, he benefited in the present instance, and shamed me at the same time.

Presently there emerged from the main hatch a gentleman in very sober clothing, followed by an apparition in the shape of the skipper of the *Kittiwake*. I knew at once who he must be, for his calling was stamped on every bit of him, despite the travesty of his garments. If the supercargo, for so I diagnosed the first of

the twain, was an unassuming person, Captain Scudamore made ample amends. He was very short and very broad, with his round bullet of a head sunk between his shoulders. He carried a hat with a profusion of gold lace on its rim, and thus his curled bob-wig was visible surmounting his bare, fat face and protuberant ears, which seemed ever on the point of flapping. His cheeks were intensely red, his eyes intensely blue and bulging, his nose prominent, his receding chin a firm lump of adiposity with two separate lines grooving it below his jaw. His expression was alert, and the way he cast his gaze about on gaining the deck struck me as being seamanlike. The gorgeousness of his apparel was, however, his prevailing feature. Imagine an embroidered lace cravat of a cream colour, a coat of a fine blue shade with elaborate cuffs, and white silk facings on the lappels. Its buttons were of tortoise shell and as large as crown pieces, while it had embroidered pocket flaps, and was decorated on the shoulders with heavy epaulettes. Picture, further, a crimson cloth waistcoat with long divided wings reaching half way down the thighs and fastened above with oblong ivory buttons, tipped with what I took to be gold. His breeches ending in black bands buckled tightly beneath each knee, and were white with a yellow stripe down the outer side of each leg, and his stockings, smooth and tight on his plump calves, were of a delicate flesh colour, while his low, red-heeled shoes were each furnished with a huge bow and buckle, and were very square cut at the toes. He looked for all the world like a parrot I had seen in the Jew's shop, his hooked nose favouring the resemblance, and the fact that his face sloped backwards from his nostrils, despite his plenitude of chin. His trunk was thick set, though from the back he had some pretensions to a waist, his coat being pinched in above his hip bones, and his legs were bowed like Corkran's, but at a greater angle. Walking with the gait of a dachshund he accompanied the supercargo to the side, where he bade him an effusive adieu, and watched him descend into the barge waving his hat the while, and, after glancing at us, making some remark apparently ludicrous, for they both guffawed with laughter. Then he turned and, rolling aft, climbed the poop stairs.

I saluted him by raising my hat, and he paid me a similar compliment, having previously resumed his own headpiece.

"Ha!" he cried in a shrill, piping voice, "it is Doctor Mortifier, no doubt. Doctor Mortifier and Mr. What's-his-name."

"Had you said Mortified," I answered, with some attempt at levity, "you had been nearer the mark; but my name is Mortimer, and that of this gentleman is Little."

All the time his quick, prominent eyes kept shifting from one to the other of us, and he swayed from his heels to his toes and then back again from toes to heels, a great trick of his as I afterwards found, for he was the most restless of mortals.

"Mortimer!" he exclaimed, "why, to be sure, a murrain on my memory, worthy doctor, and the other gentleman is Little, ho, ho, ho!"

He bent double, covering his amusement by the profundity of his bow. Although he had a thin, high voice when speaking, it grew throaty as he laughed till he was chuckling like some old hen, and all the time titupping to and fro as though set on springs. For the life of me I could not help joining to some degree in his merriment, but Jacob did not appreciate his contortions, and, leaving us together, went to the side, over which he leaned, a gigantic picture of idleness.

The captain having concluded his cachinnations, as the mate termed them, took snuff and proffered the box to me. I availed myself of a pinch, and had time to study the man's face, which, I am free to confess, did not favourably impress me, for all his apparent joviality. His forehead was low, his eyes hard, his mouth vicious, or I was no judge of character, ay, or no leech, for who has more need to read men at a glance than a physician, and who has more opportunities both for the task and for testing the correctness of his observations?

"But why mortified, doctor, why mortified?" he queried, when he had done sniffing, and the gurgle of his laugh had spent itself.

"Well, Captain Scudamore," I replied, "I am anxious at the non-appearance of your under-boatswain, that, I believe, is his correct title, who did us the favour, as you know, of securing us our passages, and who, I fear, will miss the ship."

Ere I had finished I was aware from the skipper's face that I was giving him information.

"What! what?" said he. "'Tis true, one of my crew has given us the go-by, the scurvy rascal! but flog me for a horse soldier if he ever bargained with me! I have never clapped keekers on him, Doctor Mortifex; and the other gentleman is Little! Ho, ho, ho!"

Again he gurgled joyously, but it struck me his merriment was a trifle forced.

"No, no," he went on, "your business was settled with the owners, with that great firm of respectable merchants, sir, Knab, Gripper & Holdfast, of Fleet Street. But tell me now, my dear sir, who was this slip-the-ship who did the trick for you?"

I saw no harm in telling him, so replied:

"Nicholas Corkran, a sailor fallen on hard times, but——"

"Slice me!" he cried, with a long-drawn whistle, and pirouetted a full turn upon his toes, his coat-flaps sticking out stiff behind him like the spreading tail of a pouter pigeon. "A moment, doctor," he added, and piped out to the mate: "Get that fore-top's'l sheeted home now, Master Dickenson, and then let her be hove, and smartly, for we must make the most of the ebb."

"Ay, ay, sir," rejoined the officer, and, trumpet to mouth, he bawled out his orders.

"Aloft there, fore-topsail set and square away! Jump, ye lubbers, or there'll be a rope's end on your rumps! Forrard, stand by to weigh, and see all clear. Pipe to the lazy devils, bosun, or I'll make them stir their shanks!"

He ended with a volley of oaths, and a great slab of a man with a chain round his neck came out from behind the caboose, put a silver whistle to his lips, blew thrice shrilly, and then echoed the orders in a voice of thunder.

Bare-footed mariners ran for the bows, some were busy at the catheads, others tailing on to the huge cable, which came crawling in through the hawse hole. High up on the yards, bent figures, like rags upon a clothes-line were busy, belly downwards, on the heavy spars, straightening and fixing the great square

sail which had been hanging in loose, crinkled folds, and now threshed a little as the breeze caught a corner unawares.

"Flay the lazy dog, Master Dickenson!" cried the captain, dancing in a fury, and pointing to the hapless sailor at the end of the yard who, with his naked soles clutching at the bight of a rope, was trying in vain to gather in the flapping tail of the canvas.

The mate, flinging a curse aloft, drew a thick and knotted piece of cord from the pocket of his rough sea jacket, sprang from the poop, ran to the fore shrouds, and sprawled up them like a monkey, plucking at the cross ropes hand over hand, and gaining the fore-top with astonishing rapidity. It was wonderful to see him spring out upon the yard and swing past the men till he reached the offender, when he steadied himself and soundly flogged the poor wretch with one hand, while he gripped a rope with the other, and his whole body slanted out into thin air.

"That's the way to serve him, doctor," squeaked Captain Scudamore. "Cut his cutis, cut his cutis! Odds fish! but I was a hand at the Latin myself once. See there, he's sheeted her home now, the lousy villain! and why couldn't he do it afore, tell me that, sir, tell me that?"

Though I was still wondering what was the cause of his excitement on hearing Corkran's name, I stood patiently and watched this, to me, surprising scene. True, I had been on an outward-bound vessel before, but she had merely been a small ketch running to Ostend. There had been none of this bustle and hard swearing and creaking of blocks and tackle, nor, for that matter, the quick patter of feet and the sing-song, "Yo, heave ho, my bullies, yo, heave and a yo, ho, ho!" as the row of men, some with coloured caps, dipped and swayed as they dragged upon the hawser which coiled away, wet and shining like some brown sea-snake, from the grasp of the last man in the line. The mate's place was taken by a big, slouching fellow, the third in command, who was in charge of the tiller, for the anchor flukes had quitted the river mud, and already the vessel had way on her.

I ran to the side and looked over the bulwarks. A swirl of water, dotted with cream-coloured bubbles, went curling away from under

the counter, the shore began to slip past as though moving upstream, the boatswain's whistle shrilled again, and sail after sail began to break out upon the spars, while the breeze, freshening every minute, hummed through the taut ropes. The voyage had begun, we were indeed bound for Bantam, but half-relieved, half-perturbed, and wholly suspicious, my sole reflection was that Corkran and I had parted company, and that the good ship *Kittiwake* lacked one member of her crew.

CHAPTER XI

THE RIVER OGOBO

JACOB joined me as I stood deep in thought.

"We're safe at last, doctor," said he, his honest face expressing the satisfaction he felt.

"For the present, yes," I answered, "though even yet they might put off and stop us. But what of the future?"

"It will take care of itself," said the philosopher; "but a ship is indeed a wondrous thing."

"You're right, sir," piped the voice of Captain Scudamore; "those that go down to the deep see great wonders, but the greatest is their floating home, provided it be handled smartly, and the crew well flogged. Ho, ho, ho! Is it your first voyage, gentlemen?"

"Yes," said Jacob; and "No," said I.

"I knew it," he rejoined. "Said I to myself, 'Doctor Mortlake takes kindly to the smell of tar, while the other gentleman, whose name is Little—— Ho, ho!'" He was beginning to laugh again, but checked himself as the smith's face grew dark. "'The other gentleman has never rocked upon the briny.'"

"You are of keen perceptions, sir," I answered, willing to flatter him.

"You may say so, and my keenest is my sense of smell, which tells me dinner is served; so as it's Dickenson's watch we'll below, gentlemen, and see what a round of beef will do for us, and how a glass or two of wine will moisten our throattles."

During the meal, which was served in a roomy cabin with stern

windows, well furnished with cushioned lockers, and having a perfect armoury on the walls, I made bold to ask him if he knew anything of Corkran.

"Enough for my taste," said he, a napkin tucked away at his neck and covering his finery; "for I opine you have fallen foul of a certain Virginian who knows better than to ship with me."

"An American!" I exclaimed, remembering Corkran's tales of the Potomac and the Indians.

"So they say, and a cursedly ugly one; but tell me, my dear sir, is he a shock-headed man with one ear, a scarred face, and a trinket in his beard?"

"The same," I answered.

"I knew it!" he cried. "Why, doctor, there's not a sea that keels furrow to which this Corkran is a stranger. I knew him in the slave trade from Madagascar, and the son of a dog diddled me of a cargo. A dirty villain—oh, a very dirty villain!"

"Indeed," said I—while Jacob nodded his head approvingly—"he certainly struck me as a strange mortal, but was fair enough in the few dealings I had with him."

"To be sure—to be sure—a plausible devil, sir, I do assure you; but both bad and mad, cracked in the pate, a sea-poet, and a sea-shark, sir. You may take it from me—you are well quit of him."

"Is he, then, void of all the virtues?" I asked.

"There you have me," said the captain, viewing his canary against the light with one greedy, bulging eye open and the other screwed up and closed fast, "for I must allow he is a seaman, by all the niggers I have shipped. There is no more daring fellow afloat or ashore. Why——" he began, checked himself suddenly, and added, "but mad, and a dirty villain—oh, a very dirty villain!"

"I can vouch for his courage," I remarked, for, in spite of everything, I still felt attracted by the coxswain's personality.

"What, what! But, mark you, he feared to ship with me. No doubt he found who commanded the *Kittiwake* and sheered off in time; for, let me tell you, he knows Benjy Scudamore—ay, and friend Barney, too. We have old scores to wipe off with that rip from the colonies."

I listened politely, yet could not help feeling that it would take more than Benjy and Barney combined to scare my old man of the sea. Still, he would naturally avoid putting himself into their power; but I felt that he might have informed me of his discovery. Howbeit, I considered it likely that he had not had time to tell us, while our departure could not have been longer delayed with any safety. Indeed, it was more than an off-chance that he had gained no such knowledge, but had come to grief in his carouse, and was even then dead drunk or fast in limbo, and, if so, he had been saved from further trouble; for this Scudamore spoke vindictively and looked an ill man to cross, while Barney had not found favour in my eyes, and I recalled the workings of his mouth and the scene on the foreyard.

The skipper would have questioned us as to our reasons for visiting the Cape, but I replied vaguely, and Jacob answered him in monosyllables. He praised the place hugely, though; he gave the Dutch a bad name; and then fell to spinning us yarns which were very filthy in parts, and had nothing of the breathless interest that was the main characteristic of Corkran's many tales.

All voyages, I take it, have much in common, and it would be but a weariness were I to describe how we dropped down river and cast anchor off the Downs ere night fell; how two ships of war convoyed us and a crowd of other merchantmen till every sign of land had faded. Somewhere in Biscay Bay we parted company with our consorts, which were bound for the Western Indies, and Barney Dickenson laid the bowsprit of the *Kittiwake* on a course south by west. Meanwhile we had settled to our life aboard, and had enjoyed very fair weather, though a roll off the Cornish coast had woefully upset us, Jacob, indeed, being an inert mass of misery for four and twenty hours.

Captain Scudamore thought fit to restrict us to the poop deck, and we were bound to obey him, though finding it irksome to have so limited a space for exercise. Jacob, however, was great at devising means for preventing us getting fat, and his methods of training his muscles excited the deepest interest amongst the crew, who were a motley set much given to dicing and penny-

The River Ogobo

129

tossing. I wondered what they would have said had they witnessed, as I had done, the mastering of Squire Pumphret's stallion.

So quickly do events pass that I was in some danger of forgetting what had sent me sea-faring and cast me into uncongenial company, for of the three sailors who were in authority I fancied only the second mate, a dull man of poor education, but at least decent in his talk—neither foul like Captain Benjy, nor hopelessly pedantic like Barney Dickenson.

So we fared southwards, and if some find a long voyage a weariness of the flesh, I confess such was not my experience as we forged into warm latitudes. All day the sea smiled kindly up at us—a vast, level expanse of blue, clear as a painted crystal, over which chased the merry white caps too small to trouble us, and yet lively enough to make a fuss and pother about our bows and send jets of sparkling spray dancing upwards to burst and spread and dissolve into a thousand drops, which glittered like diamonds or shimmered in the sun's rays like changing opals. In our wake a snow-white track, all froth and bubbles, ran wavingly astern and melted into nothing, blending with the blue and the tossing, snowy, wind-blown foam. Above, in a huge arch of steely blue, stretched the heavens, darkening towards the clear-cut horizon into a greenish hue like the colour on the back of a mackerel. Against the vault the fleecy clouds of the ship's canvas dipped and swayed, or pressed on steadily, the sky sweeping past high above the topmasts and reeling to the norward. The time might drag its heavy hours from the joyous spring of the sun in the east to its dip and parting wink over the world's edge, far on the western line as the shadows gathered and grew, but to me the life was glorious. The rest and peace, the ease of mind and body, the carelessness begotten of sheer laziness, and the sucking in of huge draughts of air like cool comforting wine, air which caused the eye to brighten and well-nigh intoxicated, suited me to a nicety. I staggered to the quivering pitch of the bows, I rolled to the quickening heel and the sideward toss, I hummed back to the breeze in the shrouds, and I whistled a response to the shrill notes of fleeting squalls flying with a van

guard of salt and spume between taut ropes and past canvas tense as drum-skins.

I loved those latitudes stretching from the southern confines of Biscay Bay away to the islands which show as grey hazes in the morning, ebon masses at noon, and green jewels ere the day is done and they loom grim, vague, and forbidding at the onset of sudden night. Nor was the ship herself lacking in interest. It was to me a pleasure to watch her buffeting the billows in friendly play; to mark her leap like a flying-fish, or rush before wind like a bonito; to note the saucy way she cocked her stern on a wave, and her graceful dip to some roller, a stray giant amongst ripples; to see the easy, oily slide of her shining, salt-crusted sides through the parting waters, which buoyed her and sported with her—all these things, I say, were to me a delight and wonder. So were her crew, from burly boatswain to black and greasy cabin-boy—the most a bronzed and hairy crowd, which spouted blasphemies, and spat tobacco juice, and gambled freely. Scudamore had them under his thumb, however, and they lived peaceably, coming and going round the green caboose, laying out aloft, trimming the sails, and manning the braces when we tacked, which was but rarely. Soft-footed, mossy-breasted sons of the sea, with loose pantaloons, greasy jackets, woollen jerseys, and striped or gaudy caps, they showed me a new phase of life and one full of interest.

You will take me for a mere mouther of sounding words, however, if I carry on in this strain, and there is much to tell ere we come to a finish, much boring of the shell to be done or ever we strike the kernel of this nut, which to some may prove toothsome, to others merely rottenness. That is not my business. I am here to set down truthfully my strange experiences, so again we are on board the *Kittiwake*, of which I began to have my suspicions.

Once when I had asked as to the character of her cargo, a quick glance had passed between Benjy and Barney, as Jacob called them, and it did not escape my notice.

"Splice me!" the captain had replied; "if I am to detail every article like a clerk, Dr. Mortimer (for he made pretence of a

The River Ogobo

131

shocking memory), I should sit here and talk till Bantam hove up on the port bow, or the crack o'doom split our mainsail ; while, if friend Barney took up the tally, eternity would be all too short for the recounting. Ho, ho, ho ! ”

The mate had given a wry smile, and said deliberately :

“ Yea and verily, captain ; the species of merchandise transported by this fabric of wood and canvas varies in essence, odour, usefulness, dimensions, monetary value, and capacity of preservation,” whereat they had both laughed inordinately, the mate as though he had a pebble in his mouth, and Captain Benjy making a great show of stopping up his fan-like ears.

I came to the conclusion that some form of food-stuff lay in the hold, and that perchance we were on some kind of smuggling run. In part I was right ; there was provender below, but the *Kittiwake* had not yet taken aboard her full lading, while those who were to benefit by her cargo, who were to sample the provender, had not yet gathered in hideous hordes beneath our counter, and beside our helm, had not yet taken up their ceaseless patrol or scented death and carnage from afar. “ A pirate ! ” you exclaim. “ A bloody pirate ! ” No, my friends ; there you are wrong, as I fancied the navigation was, when from the compass I perceived we were heading to the east.

We were now in latitudes where the sun stood high in the heavens, the sky was dusky with hazy heat, and the pitch soft as dripping in the seams. Good luck still attended us, for, though calmer, the breezes were yet favourable, and the sea glittered in countless tiny wavelets all day long, and at night a golden moon track wavered across the deep, and the ocean fires leaped living from the cut-water, glided past with trembling twinklings, and went dancing astern in a sheet like molten metal.

Jacob, who had not even read of such regions, was entranced and more silent than ever with amazement ; indeed, the beauty of the scene seemed to quieten the rough crew, though Barney Dickenson strove to spoil all by his wordy descriptions, and the hideousness of his mouth.

Knowing as I did that the passage to the Bay of Saint Helena occupied at least three good weeks, I was considerably surprised

one fine morning to discover we were in sight of land. The sticky warmth and stuffiness of the cabin were insufferable, and just after daybreak I mounted on deck, there to finish my broken sleep. What I saw, however, banished all slumber from my eyes. In front of us lay a long, low coast-line, clad with dense forests, backed in the far distance by rising ground whose black ridges were streaked by feathery streamers of mist, and behind which the sun was rising and shooting out broad beams of light like the spokes of some fiery wheel. Yellow strips of sand formed a beach every here and there, and on these patches the sea was breaking lazily in lines of silver, for a heavy ocean swell was rolling shorewards. The *Kittiwake* was mounting high and sliding low as she took each smooth, heaving, water wall in turn, and the thunder of their bursting came to my ears as a solemn sea music, rhythmic and subdued.

"Was this some island, or the continent of Africa?" Such was the question I asked myself and put to the second mate, John Benbow by name, who had the morning watch.

"It's Africa, right enough," said he; "we're in the Gulf and running along shore to find a certain river mouth, called in the chart the Ogobo. There is no need," he added in a low voice, "to say I told you this."

"But what does it portend?" I asked. "I understood the first place of call was either Saint Helena Bay or the Cape itself."

"Blessed if I know, sir," he replied; "sealed orders, maybe; and maybe a little game o' the skipper's. Slaves fetch a fair price at the Cape I have heard."

"Slaves!" I echoed.

This explained many things—the reticence of both Benjy and Barney anent the cargo, the fact that for several days past many of the crew had been engaged below deck, whence had come the noise of hammers clattering on wood and the clink of metal upon metal. Not that, so far as I knew, there was any harm in an honourable trade; but I liked not the secrecy and the way we had been kept aft, and kept also in ignorance of this project. Fair dealing is a jewel, and this was a sneaking, dirty job.

Moreover, I fancied a slaver would stink very vilely, and had

we been in haste we would have been wrongly delayed. Decidedly I had cause for complaint, and, to begin with, I took the liberty of going forward and descending the main hatch with the object of viewing the bowels of the ship. I soon found she was being fitted for a human cargo. There was a regular lower deck, dark and badly lit, but fitted up with places like stable-stalls, while to the shell of the ship, the bulkheads, and to posts, were fitted manacles, clasps for the neck, wristlets, anklets, and hooks and rings for the securing of ropes. It had the look of a prison-house, and the air even thus early was foul and hot.

Suddenly there came to me the picture of such a place packed with black humanity, but I reflected the negro was used to heat, and no doubt was little distressed. White men would assuredly die under such conditions ; but as for negroes, why, I knew that many vessels ran lucrative cargoes of slaves, so the latter must surely suffer but little from the confinement, and were, no doubt, well fed. For all that I liked not the look of the collars and the bracelets ; but it was no business of mine, and I dismissed the thought.

Scarcely had I regained the main deck when I was hailed from the poop, and there was Captain Scudamore with an ugly look on his parrot-like face beckoning to me, and clearly in a rage. I was determined to stand none of his nonsense, however, and walked aft very deliberately, stopping to balance to each roll and scanning the shore line.

"Blood and bones ! my fine gentleman," cried Captain Benjy coarsely, "so you will not stir your lubberly legs when I call, will you not ?"

"If you do not mend your manners, sir," said I, "I will presently stir one of them to some purpose, as you will find ; you seem to forget I am a private individual and a passenger."

"Ay, ay," said he, cooling down a little and beginning to sneer ; "one who sneaks aboard without baggage to his name, and who breaks his word whenever my back is turned."

"Harkee, sir !" I answered. "Had you dealt fairly and honourably with me, my promise would have bound me as an oath ; but you kept us both in the dark regarding this slaving venture. There was never a word as to your touching here first."

"Where?" he snarled, rather taking me aback.

"Throw your dust in other eyes," said I; "it needs not that one should be a sailor to guess why you hug a coast line with a lower deck fitted out as yours is."

"Godam!" he answered; "is every popinjay of a passenger to pry into sailing orders? Methinks we do cursedly well, sir, if we land you at your destination."

"You will do cursedly better," said I, "if you either hold your tongue or moderate your language," and with that I left him, the mate bestowing a wink of satisfaction and approval on me as he caught my eye. The quarrel was unfortunate, for though the peppery parrot, as Jacob called him, evidently thought better of things, and was profuse in his apologies, I diagnosed him as a hollow blusterer who would do us an ill turn if he could, and Barney backed him, becoming offensive in a way of his own, and one which left no loophole for attack. He shrouded his meaning in such monstrous phrases that it was impossible to take umbrage. I deemed it wiser, however, to reload my pistols, and carry them on my person; while Jacob, though he said nothing, oft-times played with the handle of his huge sledge-hammer as though it were a weapon to his liking.

All morning we stood south following the coast, and keeping perchance a couple of miles from the line of breakers. The wind was off-shore for a wonder, as it usually blows from the sea towards land during daytime in these regions, and comes stealing warm and strong-scented from forest and morass with the sinking of the sun. That sun was sloping to the west ere we descried a gap in the shore, its sides fringed by trees. Three of them, which I recognised to be palms, rose high above the others, and spread drooping fronds in thick bunches against the sky. They formed a very excellent landmark, and at sight of them we made an offing, intending, no doubt, to beat to and fro or cast anchor. The wind veered, however, and we ran inshore till we were close to the indentation which I now saw was the mouth of a wide river, beyond doubt the Ogobo of which Benbow, the mate, had spoken.

As is ever the case with the rivers in Africa there was a bar, a bank of sand heaped upon the sea-bottom, and over which the

swell broke in sounding surf, while above it fluttered a host of feathered fish-hunters crying raucously and flashing downwards in sundry dives. Upon a narrow white spit stalked long-necked birds of the crane species with great beaks and a spotted plumage. Some of them I noted were like sentinels, each with one leg drawn up, their heads and necks tucked away into their breast feathers, while their beaks stuck out stiff as ramrods from the fluffy masses of their bodies. There was a space between the two halves of the bar, swept clear by the river current, where was a channel evidently navigable, for we headed for it, under all easy sail. Steering to a nicety, Barney Dickenson ran us through on the back of a roller, and it was a fearsome sight to see the foaming masses on either side and hear their roaring as they plunged over into the still lagoon beyond.

Such was the place in calm weather, and I for one was thankful that the *Kittiwake* had not to make the venture in time of tempest or when some vast swell born of stress and storm was hurtling itself in solid water masses over the barrier and through the gap. With the wind well abaft we sailed slowly some way up the stream, the current being sluggish ; but presently the channel grew narrower, and two boats were lowered, which towed us onwards round many curves and deeper into the heart of the dense woods.

Is there anything more weird than a brown, creeping, oily river of Africa, within the tropic belt ? I trow not. The sluggish Ogobo coursed seawards in the forest gloom, its banks lined here and there by reed patches in which lurked brilliant red flowers, and here and there by trees set high on snake-like roots which thrust upwards like black deformed fingers from out the murky flood. Now and then a long vista, lined by foliage, would open up, now and then we entered some broad reach resembling a lake, in which there might be a half-sunken island, all brushwood, trailing creepers and gorgeous blossoms. The air was close, still as death, save when a distant chattering, or the shrill note of some bird or beast, sounded from far away amongst the wilderness of leaves. More than once a bird, garbed in the colours of a stained-glass window, shot in rapid flight from one dense wall to

the other, or a fish leapt into the air and fell back into its habitat with a sullen plunge, the water wrinkles widening out from the spot where it disappeared. A great melancholy got hold on me, and I longed to have Corkran at my elbow, so that he might tell me the names of the strange trees, ay, and hearten me in some measure. The place reeked of fever, and we passed damp and dismal swamps, where the forest growth was stunted and twisted, and where I first saw a huge water serpent coiled about a branch. I recalled the coxswain's song of the sea-snake with the purple head, but this reptile was a mottled black and yellow, and lay sluggish in a lethargy.

Jacob shivered as the horror of the scene struck upon him, blind though he was; but the boats' crews, no whit concerned, laboured unceasingly at the oars, and at last we swung past a projecting tongue of land, and came in full view of a clearing wherein were set low, barn-like buildings, open at the sides and with leaf-thatched roofs. They were the barrancas of a slave trader.

CHAPTER XII

THE HAUNTED SLAVER

THE moment we hove in sight there was much blowing upon horns and conches by some dozen black men, whereat Captain Benjy gave orders that one of our guns should be fired, and the roar of ordnance was answered by loud cries, and the appearance of a European from a hut larger than others of the same kind, which were dotted about the open ground.

This person embarked in a canoe paddled by brawny sons of Eblis, and almost before the ship had swung to her hawsers he was alongside. Mounting by the ladder that we had found so convenient, he gained the main deck, and came waddling aft to where Captain Benjy stood by the poop rail.

The man was a shapeless mass of fat, and puffed and blew with snortings like those of the dolphins which had at times conveyed us on our way, and which I have, so far, passed by in silence. A broad-brimmed hat shaded his wrinkled, baggy visage, which was jaundiced in hue as were the whites of his eyes. These latter were black and muddy-looking, but leered expressively. His nose was flat, broad, and the nostrils were wide-spreading and thick at the margin; his lips, tinged with yellow, were coarse and pouting, and his clothes of some thin white cloth were dirty and stained. The creature was repulsive, and breathed forth an air of sensuality and sloth. I grieve to say, for the credit of a nation which has produced brave men, that this unwholesome visitor was a pure son of Portugal; at least so he affirmed, but I take it he was both a liar and a mulatto, a cruel and crafty half-caste trader.

Captain Scudamore, in all the magnificence of his complete uniform, put him utterly to shame, though only in an abstract sense, I fear. José, I felt certain, was long since beyond the reach of any decent feelings. He noticed Jacob and myself, and evidently questioned Benjy concerning us. What the latter said I could not hear, but it afforded them both much amusement, somewhat to the ruffling of my serenity. I could not forget how the captain and the supercargo had gurgled together, and remembered that it was after the former had turned to look at us. "Was there some treachery afoot?" I asked myself.

Scudamore and the Portuguese went below, and Jacob and I were left to amuse ourselves watching the empty barrancas, the huts round which a few hens picked up a living, a monkey fastened to a post, and the background of scrub and tall trees, some shaped like fans, others with wide drooping leaves, others again with long thin stems, and a profusion of dull green foliage. No boat passed from the ship to the shore, and the village seemed utterly deserted, save for a few natives who squatted on their hams and gazed intently at the *Kittiwake*.

Suddenly from out the forest screen there rose a wild scream, followed by a noise like the cracking of a whip trace. From the huts several figures immediately appeared which joined with those upon the shore in again blowing the horns and conches, at sound of which the trader came up on deck, with Captain Benjy hard on his heels.

"It will be the caravan," said John Benbow to me, and he was right.

From a part where the trees were thin and the bush less dense, there emerged the first of what proved to be a long line of naked blacks, marching two and two, many with yokes binding them by the neck, and some with their hands fastened behind their backs. Even at the distance I noticed there were women amongst them, who stumbled wearily, while some had babes at the breast. A few little children were upon the flanks of this multitude, which was controlled by overseers armed with whips. These they did not spare, lashing the laggards vigorously, and having a special affection for the lean shanks of the helpless slaves, which, as I

thereafter found, are the most sensitive parts of a negro's body. One poor creature fell, and was flogged and kicked unmercifully till he got upon his feet again and marched forward with the others. Out from the wood they filed, more than a hundred in number, and the sight afforded José a lively satisfaction. He rubbed his fat hands together, and I noticed his stumpy fingers were loaded with rings, and that his pierced ear-lobes carried each a piece of jewellery.

"Ver goot, Señor Capitan," said he; "ees it ship at vonce or in zee mornings time?"

"What, what!" replied Scudamore. "Now? Devil a bit, my yellow phiz, we'll have them aboard first thing after daybreak. Why, 'twill be dark in a twinkling, so you can feed the swine for another night."

"Feed, oh yis! if zey be not too mooch fat at vonce," answered José, honouring his paltry jest with a laugh in which Benjy joined, tee-heeing shrilly, as was his wont.

Thereafter José, after favouring us with a bow, descended to his canoe, and was paddled ashore, where already the caravan was being bestowed under the roofs of the barrancas.

"Jacob," I whispered, "this slaving seems to me a very dirty business," and though the smith did not reply, I knew he thought as I did, for he was blinking rapidly with his blind eyes, having for all his size a very kindly heart, and being, as I have said, most admirably simple.

Now there be many who say the negro has no soul, who class him with the brutes that perish, and rank him as a beast of burden and a creature only fit to labour for the white man without wage or reward. I, Doctor Henry Mortimer, hold no brief for any son of Ham. I know his faults and deficiencies, I am aware he is low in the human scale, not to be pampered, and to be kept in subjection, but I submit that he is a fellow mortal and should be treated as such, and not as though he were some vile and stinking beetle. His woes and sufferings had not touched me before I sailed up the river Ogobo, I knew nothing of what passed in far-away corners of the earth, I was ignorant of the horrors of the slave march, of the hideous

holds of slave ships, of the appalling cruelties perpetrated by men who call themselves Christians. Slavery is no doubt right and fitting, but for God's sake let it be merciful, and not a curse and blot upon civilisation. I have said enough, let my tale be my pleader, and if I recount horrors, let it not be thought I do so gladly, or that I am a liar, like José the Portuguese. I merely tell the true tale of that haunted slaver, the English ship, the *Kittiwake*.

Jacob and I were up betimes the next morning, and watched the embarkation of the slaves, whose numbers had been augmented during the night by another and a smaller caravan. They were packed into flat-bottomed boats, rowed across to us and forced on deck with many blows and curses which threw Jacob into a frenzy of wrath. It was as much as I could manage to restrain him from doing somebody a violence; but though I sympathised with him, it was madness to think of interfering, there being guards with flint-locks at the gangway and Barney Dickenson, armed to the teeth, keeping a watchful eye on us.

A pitiful sight it was to witness the poor creatures passed below. They were all young or in the prime of life; the men, fine, muscular fellows, wearing a sullen or brutalised look, the women, ugly as sin, no doubt, with pendant breasts and greasy bodies, but timid and shrinking, like the poor children whose hands they clasped. No doubt they stank, no doubt their hair was but a frizzed wool, no doubt they were more than half-naked and had hideous noses and blubber lips and coarse ears and the eyes of hunted animals, but they were flesh and blood, ay, with crusted red upon their scored backs and great sores upon their shin-bones.

Flesh and blood, said I? nay, rather skin and bone, with sunken cheeks and huge malar arches, with bulging ribs and lean bony hips, with skinny legs sad to see, especially amongst the little ones.

I could only hope they would fare better aboard than they had done in the custody of José's vile overseers. Indeed, I reflected it would be Captain Benjy's interest to feed them well so that they might fetch better prices in the market at the Cape, which,

after all, was not now so very far away. Fool that I was ; little had I gauged the depth of the wickedness of these two villains Captain Benjy Scudamore and Barney his mate.

As soon as the slaves were all aboard, driven below, and the main hatch clapped on the combings, the crew began to raise cargo from the forehold, no doubt as payment for our living freight. Kegs of powder and of shot were lowered into the boat ; packages of food and clothing, and a barrel or two of wine or rum or brandy. Other bales were also landed, which Benbow told me contained beads, glass trinkets, hatchets and knives for barter, and muskets for the subduing of any resistance to the raids of the slavers.

At last all was ready for sea, and José, who had been drinking in the chief cabin and had concluded his bargain, returned on deck and made as though to descend into his canoe. Jacob, by this time regardless of what Captain Benjy might say, had sauntered along by the bulwarks and now stood close to the gap in them below which the side-ladder was fixed with iron hooks. I had no idea he meditated any mischief, but, feigning to be blinder than he really was, and taking advantage of a coil of rope lying on the deck he contrived to stumble over the latter and go staggering against the fat Portuguese, who was straightway sent flying into the air clean over his canoe, and so fell plump into the river. The hubbub which ensued was deafening, and I shook with laughter as I saw the scared and wrathful trader dragged into his craft soaking wet, spitting water and spluttering out oaths, while his hat drifted down stream and the crew of the *Kittiwake* grinned at him in derision.

Two men, however, by the captain's orders, for he had fallen into a towering passion, sprang at the smith before he could rise, and laid hold upon him. Better would it have been for them had they held aloof. With one heave Jacob was upon his feet, grasping a luckless mariner in each hand. In vain they kicked and struggled and squirmed in their efforts to get free. Jacob swung one into the air as though he were about to pitch him over the side, but, being very merciful at heart, he merely tossed him along the deck as one might toss a ball, and then sent his fellow

sprawling after him, so that they both sat where they fell, bruised, disconsolate, and very rueful of countenance. The smith beamed upon them with the greatest of good humour, nodded genially to Benjy as if to show how he appreciated the little jest the captain had provided, and wandered aft to join me who all this time had kept a hand on the butt of one of my pistols in case necessity should force me to use it. Happily Scudamore was too scared by this exhibition of strength to make any threatening movement, and he relieved his feelings by swearing back at José, so that the anchor was weighed amidst a babel of blasphemies and recriminations, and in this very auspicious manner we started to traverse once more the waters of the Ogobo. One boat took a rope ahead of the ship, another kept one taut astern and so prevented the *Kittiwake* swinging broadside on to the current.

Captain Scudamore, despite his burst of rage, was highly satisfied. The caravans had come in at the proper moment, and we had only passed one night in those dangerous latitudes, so that he trusted the health of the crew would not suffer.

His expectations were not justified. As the weather was still calm we again crossed the bar in safety, and I, for one, was not sorry to watch the coast-line grow faint and indistinct and hear the slapping of healthy wavelets against the stout timbers of the slaver instead of the lap, lap of the brown and stealthy waters of the fever river.

At the same time I was troubled about our position on board. Jacob had always been a source of wonder to the crew on account of his size and other peculiarities. In all probability he was now viewed in the light of an enemy. I soon found we were to be left much to ourselves, for even Benbow kept apart, though I knew he wished us well.

Beyond passing the time of day we ceased to hold converse with Benjy or Barney, though we sat at the same table and ate the same ship's food, now grown distasteful to our palates. A capon or two from the trader's village soon vanished, chiefly down the captain's gullet, as the carving fell to him, and we returned to our salted meat and other delicacies.

So passed a day or two, but in that period several things

happened. Three negroes died and were hove overboard like carrion. I offered my services, hoping to aid the sick; but the skipper merely looked me up and down, without a word, in a manner intended to be very fine, but which reminded me of a parrot following the movements of a finger held in front of him.

Thus we fed the sea with dead, and the sea-scavengers scented prey, and were presently upon our track, a couple of those hideous snouted fish, with curved mouths set far back, lined by row upon row of cutting teeth. Every morning I noted their shadowy bodies lying astern, swimming slowly, but easily keeping up with the ship, or marked their sharp back-fins slicing through the surface, above which a curving length of tail now and then showed as well. The corpse would splash alongside, and in a moment our followers were gone, rushing to worry and tear in a way which sickened me with horror. Their feast over, they were again with us, their little pig-like eyes turned up as though in expectation, while now and then they half-turned lazily upon their sides and showed a gleam of white bellies and the cruelty of their maws.

Very soon they had variety in their diet. One of the crew fell ill, and although I was permitted to attend him, I could do nothing for his vomitings and raging fever, and he also, without prayer or service, and despite my protests, went overboard to the hunting, haunting sharks.

Nor was this all. One night, being unable to sleep by reason of the heat, I was lying upon my bunk bathed in sweat and listening to Jacob's snorings, when I heard faint and indistinct, but none the less surely, the sound of singing. It was the merest trace of a melody, coming in snatches which I had to strain my ears to catch, but beyond doubt some one was lifting his voice in song away in the bowels of this accursed ship. It was no sea-strain from the foc'sle, for it was the dead of night, and, besides, this lilt was of such a tenor as to make my skin creep. It was inexpressibly weird and mournful. At once my thoughts sped back to Corkran and the most eventful night of my life, but I smiled at my folly. Some wretched slave was perchance piping a mournful ditty of Africa, recounting his sufferings, for, as I live,

the cadence had in it something which suggested the idea of a lost soul.

The next morning another negro, this time a woman, went as *largesse* to our pensioners.

Shocked and disgusted, I hesitated no longer, and taking the matter in my own hands I went below. The slave deck was a hell, the air most foul and stale and stinking, the planks filthy, the wretched creatures dying for want of Heaven's breezes, for a breath of what was lavished on us above, for a sight of the sun, and perhaps, more than all, for lack of hope, and from the rusting of the fetters of despair into their sinking hearts. I could do nothing but expostulate and urge that they should be brought up on deck in batches. I pointed out that it was merely common sense, and that to do so would benefit the captain's own pocket, but I reasoned, ay, and stormed in vain. To my mind the mere fact that I voiced the suggestion stiffened his neck and made him play the fool. He forbade me to go near his cargo, but I snapped my fingers at him, and now and then took them scraps of food or a measure of wine. They showed no gratitude, save one mother whose child was dying, and in due course found a hideous grave. Were I so minded I might write pages on this matter and conjure up visions of that nightmare between decks; but I refrain, partly because it scarce bears repetition, partly because I have yet much to tell and fear to lose the thread of my narrative.

There was no singing the next night, but something which, to me, was even more surprising. I resolved to sleep on deck, despite the fact that the moon was full and its light said to be dangerous. The sun sank to his rest, tinging the whole ocean a blood-red hue, while the horizon was one flaming mass of crimson and yellow, streaked with purple clouds, which had salmon-tinted linings, and changed in colour every moment. I noted, as I had done before, that the orb of day set far out beyond our bowsprit, therefore our coast was still westerly, a fact which perplexed me not a little. The light faded, the brilliance of the scene was lost in shadow, and black darkness swept down on us for a space, though silver stars shone and twinkled in every quarter of the vault, some being of an extraordinary brightness.

Presently, at one spot there came a shimmer of light upon the very verge of the ocean, and then there crept into view the golden rim of the queen of night. Slowly the moon rose, and a myriad sparkles stretched from it in a broadening track till the whole heavens were flooded with radiance and a wide patch of sea glittered as though set with spangles. It was exceeding beautiful, but, God knows, I had just then no eye for the loveliness of nature. And why? you ask. Because of the misery below, because of fear or anxiety, because of the knowledge of man's wickedness and cruelty? Not so, but because of what I saw clearly outlined against the great yellow ball on the horizon. It was no other than a man's bare head. The outline of human shoulders cropped up above the bulwarks and on these was set the head, the back of which was towards me, but what caused my pulse to quicken, and fixed my gaze, and roused in me a multitude of speculations and a vague hope was the fact, believe it or not as you will, that against the full face of the moon I plainly saw an ear projecting on one side of the head, while there was no such expansion on the other. I shifted my position, but there was no change in the outline of the head. On one side, the right side, it swept from hair to neck in an unbroken line, on the other was the edge of the auricle blending below with the curve of the skull. What being was this who gazed at the rising moon, and then, for the head vanished as I stared at it, was gone silently and suddenly into the shadow of the caboose? Was there any man of the crew so deformed? I could not recall any such. The shape of the skull was not that seen in the negro, and it was unlikely any slave could slip on deck. By all the fiends! could this be Corkran? I asked myself, and a moment later was striving to remember which ear it was that had been severed with his scalp, for he had told me the full tale of his mutilation when we were in hiding in London. I could not decide the question, but of this I was very sure, the slaver *Kittiwake* was haunted by two prowling fish of prey, by some one who sang at dead of night somewhere in her depths, and by the figure of a man who, as I am a truthful mortal, lacked the ear of one, and that the right side of his mysterious head.



CHAPTER XIII

THE HAMMER OF THOR

As may well be imagined, I had little sleep that night. My brain was so devoted to the consideration of this matter that it had neither time nor inclination to rest. Step by step I went over the arguments for and against the presumption that Nicholas Corkran was on board.

I am not minded to trouble the reader, if such there be, with my cogitations. Suffice it to say I could come to no conclusion, though I felt certain that if any man could exist in the bowels of a ship for many days and keep his presence there a secret, that man was the sailor from the Americas, whose lot had become so strangely mixed up with mine. I resolved to tell Jacob nothing, for he had no great love for the old rip, and a secret was, in any case, safer within one cranium than shared betwixt two. Granting Corkran did own that head which I had seen against the moon, what I could not fathom was his object in playing such a prank. He must have suffered a plenitude of inconveniences, especially since the blacks were stowed away in the death-trap below, and, hardy man though he was, I knew he loved the fresh air and the sunlight. It may have been his only safe way of accompanying us, I at length reflected, and, so thinking, felt again that odd affection for him which I had before entertained, somewhat to my own undoing.

On recovering from my stupefaction, I had darted forward and descended to the main deck, but had searched in vain for the figure I sought.

Benbow, who was officer of the watch, had apparently not remarked the black outline of the earless skull, and I was careful not to mention the subject to him, but lay idly in my bed-clothes on the poop planking, and was delivered of these vain imaginings which I have so briefly put on record.

Towards morning the weather changed. The fiery sunset and the wondrous afterglow had not been there for nothing, and the day broke grey and sullen, while we ran into a lumpy, mud-coloured sea, and from the wave-tops little spurts of spray shot forth viciously at the bidding of a rising breeze. That breeze, ere long, quickened into a half-gale, and for the first time the *Kittiwake* plunged like a restive horse, and swept nose deep through the surges with scanty canvas. Darker grew the sky, there came a roll of thunder, and a few distant lightning flashes. Every moment the gusts grew more furious and shrilled more loudly through the rigging, while a warm rain pattered in heavy drops upon the deck.

With a crack like that of a dozen muskets discharged in a volley a sail split from yard to yard, and in a twinkling was nought but a few fluttering rags streaming to leeward and beating furiously on the spars. Long lines of charging waves chased each other across the face of the deep, and went roaring and seething and hissing beneath the keel. We staggered along down wind, but the sea followed fast, till Captain Benjy, afraid of being pooped, wore ship in a very masterly way, and soon we were riding it out, sliding up and sliding down, for the *Kittiwake* was buoyant as a gull.

Jacob, though I knew him to be a brave man, was prostrate with fear, for he hated the ocean, and had done so ever since the Channel heave had robbed him of one good meal at least.

Having got my sea legs long since, I, on the whole, enjoyed the turmoil and the buffetings, though at first a trifle scared to see the breaking crests which now and then came thundering, solid and threatening, over the cat-heads, and swept, hissing and gurgling, to the scuppers.

Like some duck the gallant ship shook herself free, however, and though trembling at the shocks, she ever rose triumphant,

flinging the salt spume from her jibboom, shaking her clean-cut bows, and darting joyously to meet and mount her next eager, foam-clad adversary.

It was all very well on deck, but from below one could hear, even though the hatches were battened down, the muffled sound of wailing and lamentation.

Shut up in the pitch darkness, in the stifling hold, tossed this way and that, with limbs breaking and hearts aquiver with terror, it was no wonder the wretched slaves gave vent to their misery. Barney Dickenson, who, with two brawny seamen, was at the swinging tiller, cursed them like the brute he was, but I am free to confess that I felt full of compassion for the unfortunates whom I could in no way succour.

At the hour of sunset the wind fell rapidly, as did the sea, till the slaver rode upon a smooth swell, which lessened in volume as the minutes sped. Even then, however, I was quick to notice a sluggishness about her movements. At all times low in the water, and drawing more than ever since the negroes had been packed away, she yet seemed to me to have settled deeper. She rose heavily and with a lurch, she tilted lazily, she staggered in her descents. I saw the skipper look over the side, and then he ran forward, dived into the foc'sle, and disappeared for a time. After a little a sailor came staggering aft, mounted to the poop, tugged at his forelock, and addressed Barney Dickenson in a voice intended to be low, but loud enough for me to hear him.

"Cap'n says to man the pumps, sir ; the carpenter has sounded and finds water in the well——"

The mate checked him with a mouth-filling oath, and then, seeing I was listening, drew him aside, and no doubt found how many feet the carpenter had measured and the extent of the danger.

A moment later the boatswain's whistle blew a series of warning notes, and the crew fell to the job most hated by seamen—the weary labour at the pumps, to the sound of splashings and the sobbing of the plungers.

"How well Corkran's song pictured the scene !" thought I, as I watched them.

So we had sprung a leak, and it might be that death faced us!

The *Kittiwake* carried three boats, two very large, the other a gig. In event of her foundering they would accommodate the crew and Jacob and myself; but I thought of the slaves, and turned sick at heart. Ay, and I remembered also the vision of the previous night, and wondered if this catastrophe would drive any lurker, any stowaway, on deck. No one would tell me the real risk we ran,—Benbow, because he was ignorant of it; Barney, because he delighted in seeing me on tenter-hooks of anxiety.

Clank, clank! There is no sound more melancholy on ship-board than the dreary music which is too often the prelude to a burial, the burial of a gallant ship and gallant men fathoms deep amongst the shell-fish and the coral and the age-old slime of the sea-bottom.

Clank, clank! So it went on all night, a fight for the mastery; relay after relay working till they were spent, but though we kept the leak under, we did not lessen the water in the hold by one jot or tittle.

Clank, clank! Jacob and I laboured and sweated with the rest, and others provisioned the boats and got everything in readiness to leave the vessel. A sail dragged beneath the keel was tried, but failed to help us; the strained plank or started butt could not be found, it seemed as though we were doomed.

Captain Benjy, who, though he fumed and fussed, was a navigator and seaman of no mean parts, came to the conclusion that the leak was fairly high up, and that by lightening the ship we might get at it. Consequently they began to jettison the cargo, and to drop every gun but one over the side. All manner of barrels and bales went bobbing astern, the cannon splashed and vanished, but to no purpose.

Fortunately it fell very calm in the morning, but to add to the horror of the situation, there began to gather round us the ravening monsters of the deep. Some dead slaves had been sent adrift, and no doubt these attracted our old pensioners and others of their kind, or perchance some strange instinct warned them that in addition to these pickings there might yet be a veritable

feast spread for them in this lonely spot amongst the waste of waters.

Strong and hot rose the sun, and threw his beams on a ship-load of weary and disheartened men and a slaver from whose hold rose to heaven a multitude of piteous cries. The negroes must have known what those monotonous noises on deck meant, and apprehended no other fate than that of being drowned like rats in a hole, hence their miserable outcry.

Captain Benjy ordered the hatches to be again clapped on, but by this time the crew had gathered in the bows, and presently sent a deputation aft, headed by the boatswain, whose efforts to explain the wishes of his comrades and yet not offend his superiors were worthy of a diplomatist. It seemed that the crew had for several nights heard the strange singing, and were scared thereat, imagining the vessel to be haunted by the ghost of that member of their mess who had died with much sweating and vomiting, and who had been cast like a dog to the finned fiends which quartered our track and looked to us for meat.

The captain listened gravely and with all attention to this statement.

"What, what!" said he. "But this is most villainous superstition! splice me if 'tis not. But let it rest, let it rest. And have you, then, any remedy to suggest? Have my babes yonder, whom I thought to be stout bullies, any ideas on the subject, think you, my friend?"

"Weel, sir," said the boatswain, who was a Scot, "I'm no verra sure, but I jalouse frae their clishmaclavers that they wadna' mind gin they had to tak' to the boats and quit the bit barkie a'thegither. I'm no sayin' I think the same, but it's a fearsome sound o' nichts, for I've heard it masel', and forbye there's sax feet o' wabblin' water in the forepeak."

"Ay, ay!" said Benjy; "and six feet of wabbling fat four feet from my nose."

He paused, and I looked for a storm; but an idea seemed to strike him.

"Go and tell my brave boys," said he, "that I am considerably beholden to them for their information and suggestion as to the

management of this, my ship, and that the first mate and I will take it *ad avizandum*. There's a fine lawyer's phrase for my unweaned calves to chew the cud upon with their jaw tackles."

Having delivered himself of this peculiar simile, he summoned Barney, and the pair of them vanished below, to reappear again ten minutes later, while all the time the pumps clanked steadily, and the fate of the *Kittiwake* hung in the balance.

Barney, who rarely issued an order save through his speaking-trumpet, now bellowed a command that the crew should lay aft, and then hinted, none too politely, though with much circumlocution, that he could dispense with my presence and that of Jacob.

I replied firmly that we had as much at stake as any one else, and a perfect right to listen to the captain, as the safety of the vessel and all on board was concerned.

"Let the learned gentleman stay, by all means," sneered Scudamore, rocking from his toes to his heels. "Oh, yes, let him stay, mayhap he also will continue to teach Captain Benjy how to manage his affairs."

It was on the tip of my tongue to tell him he had more need of some one to instruct him in manners and deportment; but I refrained, for it was no time to quarrel, with the hold awash, the crew inclined to mutiny, and half a dozen huge fish of prey rubbing themselves on our keel and nosing our rudder.

"Now, my merry crew," continued this would-be cynic, "many a ship master would have clapped half of you in irons, and flogged you to boot, while in my day I have served with men who would have thought nothing of running a couple of the ugliest of you up to yonder yard-arm. Nay, more, had Jack Kidd fallen foul of you, he would have spread-eagled a few of you with your mugs to the keelson, and let the barnacles rip you on one side and Jack shark do the same on the other. Do you hear that?"

The sullen crowd backed away a little from this imaginative commander, who strutted up and down as he spoke, and kept fingering the hoop of his hanger. For his part, he leaned over the poop-rail, repeated his last sentence with the full vigour of his squeaky voice, and again resumed his promenade and his address,

"Do you hear that? Ay, you may slink, you dogs, but thank your stars that Captain Benjy was born merciful. Now, harkee! my mate Barney has heard this voice o' nights, and it is no more a ghost than the bosun' there. You might go, every one of you, to starve and madden in the boats, but I have my good passengers to consider. Oh, yes, there are the passengers, and I will be merciful to you, even at the cost of my cargo."

I could scarcely believe my ears, and yet I was not deceived. There was something behind all this concern for Jacob and myself, and presently it was apparent.

"Amongst the black ivory below," continued Scudamore, "there is an evil rascal of a Ju Ju, or an Obi man, who is working a spell on us, and praying and singing to his fetish. Had I time, I would single him out, and then short shrift to the rogue; but it is better to make a clean sweep. In this way we rid the ship of the sorcerer, and lighten her at the same time, so that haply we may reach the leak, and make all taut. One good white Christian is worth a hundred ebony heathen, but I am a man with huge bowels of compassion, and Heaven forbid that I should proceed to any such extremities! Howbeit, mark you, if we sink there is no room for the black swine in the boats, so it's all square in whatever manner you look at it. It would appear the slaves must drown in any case. The only question is, are you to drown along with them, or are you not? It is no concern of mine, so, my bullies, settle it amongst yourselves. Will you heave the niggers overboard, or will you not?"

I was aghast at this terrible suggestion. I could scarcely believe the weight of our living freight made much difference to the water-line, and it seemed to me that this inhuman monster was but doing his best to get the crew to remain and help him to save the ship, no matter what the sacrifice might be. I knew he prided himself inordinately on the fact that he had never yet lost a vessel. It was his boast that neither by faulty navigation, by wind nor wave, by uncharted reef, by mutiny nor piracy, had he been forced to relinquish his command in a career of twenty and odd years. I have called him an inhuman monster, and yet there was sense in what he said if the ship was doomed as she then lay.

My reason told me so, though my mind shrank from contemplating the execution of his suggestion. His allusion to his passengers had been cunningly contrived, and I fancied that Barney had a hand in it from the smirk on the latter's face. It made it difficult for us to oppose the captain's plans, for that the pair had devised this procedure and meant to carry it out there could be no doubt. I have ever had the faculty of seeing both sides of a question, the which is not an unmixed blessing, for it often prevents rapid resolution and speedy action, and may blunt the sense of right and wrong. There is, I verily believe, an argument to be found for every evil deed ever perpetrated. Excuses, I take it, are the most easily discovered treasures in the world. To be sure this quality of mind is a very excellent thing in the case of a physician who has lost a patient and has a few qualms of conscience concerning the treatment he adopted, but it is altogether out of place under such conditions as confronted me on the poop of the slaver.

Fortunately Jacob, who was never troubled by delicacies, solved the riddle in a way very much his own. He also heard Captain Benjy's speech, and, apparently unnoticed by any one but myself, vanished down the after-hatch which led from the poop to the stern cabins. When he appeared again he bore a bundle, his smith's apron, in the folds of which, as I knew, the great sledge hammer was concealed.

Meanwhile, to do the crew justice, a chill of horror fell upon them. They were silent, and stood shuffling their feet uneasily and looking at each other with faces full of dread. It was easy to see that this alternative was not to their taste. Captain Benjy had shifted the responsibility on their shoulders, and they were sheep to be driven, servants, and not masters. To this day I can recall the scene : Benjy, gorgeously appparelled, moving restlessly about on his bowed legs as he awaited the crew's decision ; Barney standing beside him with his hands deep in his pockets, his sandy visage impassive, his lower lip shut tight upon its fellow ; the crowd of men forward, eager, yet with hang-dog looks ; the sweep of the curving deck, the green caboose, the round trunks of the masts, the high-cocked bowsprit, the hanging sails, the rope-tags, the pumps clanking dismally, the splash of the spouting waste, and

the incessant and lamentable clamour of the slaves. Yes, and I can see myself, irresolute, a poor figure, and Jacob with his mysterious bundle, and the light of a great resolve upon his countenance. To him this plan was wholly brutal and abominable, and, therefore, it was to be checked. He had a great faith in the Almighty, and in letting things take their own course. The curious thing is that he regarded them as having done so even if he interfered. It was, however, quite otherwise did any other party seek to create a diversion. His logic was to me incomprehensible, but he backed it by arguments, the force of which none could deny. They were those of sheer animal strength and dauntless courage.

What might have happened it is hard to say, but as the crew stood irresolute, the captain, who could see over their heads, uttered an exclamation, and called out to the mate. I ran to the rail and was in time to witness the main hatch fall back on the planks and a huge negro rise through the opening. He sprang on deck, and a second followed him, while the round woolly poll of a third came cropping upwards.

The slaves had broken loose and were swarming up from below !

Barney, however tedious in speech, was no laggard in action. In a second he whipped out a pistol, levelled it at the unarmed negro who headed the others, and fired. The man sprang into the air like a buck when it is shot, and collapsed, limp and motionless on the planking. Whether necessary or not, this was murder, slaughter in cold blood, and at the sound of the report a frenzy seemed to take the crew. They rushed in a body at the two slaves who had also gained the deck, and in a trice had run them, shrieking with terror, to the side, and hove them overboard, pitching also to the sharks the corpse of the poor wretch whom Barney's bullet had struck down. I doubt not but that the other slaves would have shared a similar fate had it not been for Jacob. Like me, he was surprised at the suddenness with which the tragedy had occurred, but the three distinct splashes were scarcely at an end when he quickened to action.

"Draw on the villains, doctor !" he roared, and flinging aside the apron, revealed the hammer in his hands,

With one bound he was at the head of the poop stairs, with another he was on the main deck, and a clumsy run carried him to the hatchway. I could only watch him with the tail of one eye, for at his cry I made ready one of my barkers, and shouted out to Benjy and his mate, "Stir as much as a finger at your peril!"

I had them at an advantage, and well they knew it, standing rooted to their respective spots as though turned to stone. I think it was the first time I had ever seen Captain Benjy perfectly motionless.

When I could risk a momentary glance at Jacob, I found he had himself clapped on the heavy hatch, a prodigious effort, and was now standing astride it swinging his weapon lightly, making play with it delicately and in a most innocent fashion. The crew were clustered together, staring at him in amazement, as well they might. The man looked enormous. His attitude was defiant, even though he smiled pleasantly and toyed playfully with his hammer. He towered to his full height, his head thrown back, his shoulders braced squarely, and then, grasping the handle in one hand, he rolled up the sleeve of his right arm above the elbow, and displayed the gnarled and knotted muscles which controlled the movements of his great bones. Shifting the hammer, he bared his other forearm, and then nodded to the assembled crowd, as though to say:

"I am now ready for you, gentlemen. Come on, when and how you please."

Not that I saw everything, for I was otherwise engaged, squinting along my pistol barrel, and marking Barney's ugly visage at the end of it, but I saw enough to describe all with some show of correctness.

"Go on pumping!" I heard the smith cry, and the monotonous clank, clank, which had ceased, began again, for the leaking slaver *Kittiwake* had changed commanders.

Jacob, the most retiring and inoffensive of mortals, now stood in Captain Scudamore's shoes, and issued orders as if to the manner born, but I am free to confess that had I not stood by him his rule had been short. Happily the crew had no firearms,

but even had they been so armed, I question if they would have used them. I may be wrong, but I fancy there was admiration stamped upon not a few of their faces, while they must have been tickled, as I was, to see how neatly Benjy and Barney had been trapped. No doubt I was the chief and immediate cause of the discomfiture of that precious pair, no doubt it was my levelled pistol which held them in check, but the credit of this transformation scene belonged wholly to the mighty smith. As he stood triumphant on the hatchway it struck me that he might very well have passed for that god of war concerning whom I had read, that hero of the hammer whom the bold vikings of old honoured and worshipped, that dweller in Valhalla, whose fame has been handed down in song and saga, and who owned the proud title of Thor the Thunderer.

CHAPTER XIV

A TRIPLE PERIL

THE position was undoubtedly peculiar. I had no desire to kill or maim any one ; and yet it looked as though such a course would be forced upon me, for it was impossible to stand thus for ever. Jacob's action was prompted by a kindly heart, and a compassion for the suffering blacks ; yet it might very well be that he was dooming them to a fate scarcely less horrible than that which threatened them. He told me afterwards that he could hear them beating on the under-surface of the hatch with their bare fists, and crying pitifully.

The crew were certainly disinclined to feel the weight of the smith's hammer, and yet were influenced by the weight of the words used by the captain in his brief harangue. The slaves' wish was to gain the deck, but the weight of Jacob Little prevented them accomplishing their object. As for Benjy and Barney, I believe their sole desire was to get out of range of the weapon I kept steadily pointed at the latter's head. As far as they were concerned, it was not the time for vain speculations regarding the future.

I repeat, the position was peculiar. Things, indeed, seemed at a deadlock, when an idea occurred to me.

"Get to work and make a raft, men," I shouted ; "and then, if need be, these poor wretches below will have a chance, and their blood will not rest on your heads."

"Ay, ay, sir," sang out the boatswain, glad, I fancy, of anything which might break the tension ; and, under his directions, the crew set to work with a will.

The ship's armoury was aft, and could not be reached save from the poop, so there was no chance of any of the men securing a weapon, against which Jacob's strength and courage would have been of little avail. In any case, as I have said, the sailors seemed to bear him no ill-will, not even those whom he had treated a trifle roughly as we lay off the trading village on the banks of the Ogobo.

Benjy's face was a picture. At all times red, it was now purple with suppressed wrath and chagrin. He prided himself on his dignity, and was in reality a very firm commander, though somewhat of a tyrant. To have his authority thus usurped by his passengers was gall and wormwood. Barney's mouth worked convulsively, but otherwise he showed no sign of the storm raging in his soul—if, indeed, he boasted such a possession, the which I take the liberty of doubting, and not without reason.

John Benbow had all this time been below, spent with toil at the pumps ; but he reappeared at this juncture, and stood gazing in astonishment at the scene. The captain heard him, and though he dared not so much as turn his head, shouted to him to fetch a pistol from the cabin and make an end of the dog ; for so he designated my humble self.

By way of answer I produced my other weapon.

"You go at your own risk, sir," said I. "But I know you to be a gentleman, who will not see murder done."

The words, however, were scarcely out of my mouth, when the carpenter came running out of the foc'sle, in great perturbation, and crying, "To the boats ! to the boats !"

It was clear that he had found the leak gaining on us, and from his manner the danger was imminent. The crew abandoned their task, and rushed to the falls. In an incredibly short time they had lowered both boats, bundled into them, and pushed off, rowing vigorously to get clear of the doomed ship, and regardless of the fact that their small craft were crowded to excess. The gig hung astern, and I called out to Benbow, asking him to get her in the water, which he promptly did, loosing one rope after the other till she settled fairly on an even keel. Then I ordered Benjy and

Barney into her; and they obeyed me like lambs, lowering themselves hand over hand, while I leant over the side, and kept a pistol ready for each of them. They more than made up for their willing compliance by their language, which, I am free to confess, was the most remarkable I had ever heard.

It was then I observed how low in the water the *Kittiwake* was lying. She seemed to be settling fast to her grave.

"Now, Master Benbow," said I, "'tis your turn." But even as he was about to swing himself over the taffrail there came a hail from away forward, a shout which caused my heart to leap, and was wellnigh the cause of my undoing. Forgetting the necessity for watchfulness in sheer amazement, I looked behind me. Crack! A bullet grazed my neck; for Barney was not the villain to miss such an opportunity. Nor was the captain. Benjy whipped out a knife and severed both ropes before I recovered myself sufficiently to pay due attention to the pair of rogues. The shot angered me; and taking aim at Dickenson, I fired, even as he was levelling a second pistol at my head. His arm dropped to his side; but already the boat was some distance from the ship, which had a little way on her. Scudamore let fly at me; but both Benbow and I took refuge behind the bulwark, and came to no harm. I might have returned the compliment, but the idea of doing so never entered my head, for I knew the voice which had uttered the shout, and in my brief glance forward I had seen a man climbing out of the fore-hatch, a man with a tousled mass of hair, who was waving his arms, and appeared to be in a prodigious hurry, and him I also knew.

It was no other than Corkran the Coxswain.

My ears had not deceived me, my eyes had not played me false. It was his singing I had heard; his was the head I had seen outlined against the moon. The old rip had not deserted us; no slip-the-ship was he, though she had lacked an under-boatswain. All these days he had lain hid, intent on some deep game of his own; but now it would appear that, like some rat, he had been forced into the light of day, and, I feared, too late—both for us and for himself. Apparently he did not share my forebodings.

"Here with you, Doctor Harry!" he yelled, and flung himself upon the handle of one of the pumps.

"Come with me, Benbow," I cried to the mate, who was dumb and open-mouthed with astonishment at this apparition. "There must yet be a chance." And together we ran forward, while Jacob, quitting the hatch, joined us.

It was no time for words; but I noticed that Corkran was dripping wet from his wig to his shoes. From the latter the water squelched, as he worked desperately. The whole four of us laboured with a tremendous vigour, and the streams gushed freely to the scuppers. Once or twice the vessel rolled sluggishly, now and again she lurched in a drunken fashion, and there was something in her movements that would have caused us to redouble our efforts, had that been possible. As it was, we were not conscious of fatigue. We were fighting against time, struggling for our lives; and soon the sweat broke out upon us, and we were pumping like clockwork rather than men, our arms rising and falling apparently of their own accord, though our teeth were set and our eyes strained with the intensity of our endeavours.

Clank! clank! The minutes sped, each moment a lifetime of anxiety, each movement perchance our last.

"Go on!" gasped Corkran to Jacob Little. "I am spent," and threw himself down upon the planking.

"What use is't?" Benbow managed to articulate, as he paused a second to straighten his weary back.

"Go on!" gasped Corkran again. "The leak is plugged." And having so said, he lay upon his back, and drew long, sobbing breaths of exhaustion.

"Plugged!" The word rang in my head, and brought me a gleam of hope. It heartened all three of us, and we bent to our painful toiling with renewed vigour.

I cannot tell how long we carried on; but we were arrested by a great clattering on the deck, and an exclamation from Corkran. A glance revealed the fact that a fresh peril awaited us. The blacks, who for a time had ceased their useless efforts to free themselves, had again tried to force up the main hatch, being no

doubt once more alarmed at the noise of the pumps. Now they had succeeded. They had thrust back the heavy cover, and were swarming up the stair-ladder; and this time they were armed. Their own manacles, billets of wood, and plank-ends formed their weapons. Nor was this all. Some of them had worked their way forward, and came streaming out of the fore-hatch—a savage, terrified, famished crowd.

With shouts and yells, they rushed at us; but getting our backs set against the bulwarks, we prepared to meet them. It was no time to feel pity for the hapless wretches; there was not a moment to parley with them. They were insane with fear, athirst for blood, unreasoning, and wholly horrible. Their eyes rolled in frenzy, and till then I never knew how much white there is in the eye of a negro; their knuckles were bleeding, their big mouths open, and their strong, clean teeth gleaming in contrast to the deep black of their skins, the dusky hue of their lips, and the red of their tongues. Again, I say, they were horrible, like some nightmare, some hideous hallucination of a disordered brain.

Corkran was the first to take toll of them. Though he was wet, the primings of his pistols were dry, and he fired twice in rapid succession. Three men fell, for the range was close and they were tightly packed. I pitched up the barker I had not discharged, but it merely flashed in the pan. Benbow was unarmed, but there remained Jacob Little. He was loth to join battle with those whom he had striven to aid, but there was no help for it. His heavy hammer was again in his hands, and with something like a groan he sprang forward in our defence.

I have seen fights, I have witnessed strange and desperate struggles, but rarely anything resembling the contest which ensued. A tall, raw-boned black sprang at the smith, but the latter swung his weapon sideways, and then it crashed full upon the negro's skull. The man was dead in an instant, the whole lateral aspect of his cranium being driven in as a door gives before the stroke of a battering ram. Again the hammer head rose, this time aloft, and it fell with a sickening thud on a rounded skull cap. The bones of the negro's vault are thick and strong, but nothing human could withstand so fearful an impact. The top of the man's crown

cracked and sank inwards as an eggshell does when tapped with a spoon, and two jets of crimson spurted from his wide nostrils. Then Jacob saw red, he went fighting mad, and plunged forward, raining blows this way and that, on woolly hair, on lean shoulders, on arms and necks and chests and backs. The slaves struck at him, they caught at his legs, they sprang hither and thither, but nothing could stop the mighty smith. He hurled them out of his way, he trampled them under foot, he smashed and splintered them, and drove them before him, till with a wail of woe they fled, tumbling headlong below, or running wildly forward, screaming and throwing up their arms. We were saved by the strength of a strong man, but when none faced him Jacob came to himself, and as he saw the deck and what lay on it, he dropped his fearsome hammer, covered his eyes with his hands, and wept in misery at the slaughter he had wrought.

"Stap me!" said Corkran, "but this is the queerest thing of all," and having so said he fell apumping again, leaving us to batten down the main hatch, and secure the egress forward. To tell the truth, I scarce think there was any necessity for such precautions, the foe being utterly cowed; but I soon found there was need of others. I had no opportunity to rally Jacob, or express sympathy with him, I could not look after the wounded slaves, I did not even join Corkran and Benbow at the pumps, for as I glanced seawards I saw the three boats approaching the ship, the sun glancing and gleaming on the spots where the oars dipped, and on the water-drops, feathering from the blades. Several men had been transferred to the gig which was leading by a couple of lengths, and it was evident that Captain Benjy was intent on boarding, and, if possible, retaking his own vessel.

"They are coming!" I cried out to the coxswain.

"The black devils!" he replied, relinquishing his hold on the handle and looking anxiously about him.

"No, no," I shouted, being by this time excited, "the *Kitti-wake's* crew, with Benjy and Barney at their head."

"Ho, ho!" he answered, "split me if this is not a rare jest!"

To tell the truth, I did not agree with him. The sailors alone would not have greatly troubled me, but the pair in the gig were

customers of another sort. They had lain on their oars, awaiting the last dip and bow of the *Kittiwake*, but when this did not occur, and there was no sign of the ship settling deeper, they grew suspicious. It may be the brief combat with the blacks delayed their approach, and if so it counted in our favour, for we were now able to turn our attention to them, the which we straightway proceeded to do under Corkran's guidance. That astonishing man explained his statement in a few words.

"Pulling a long mug, Doctor Harry?" said he. "Egad! but you have not the heart of a periwinkle, and I see your prognosis of this case is scarce worth a finger-snap. Man, we've got rid of enough of good green sea to let her float while it's calm, and, unless my old eyes have failed me with living in the dark, there's a six-pounder yonder on the poop."

I understood him immediately, but I had no wish to fire upon the crew. It chilled me to the marrow to think of men struggling in the water, infested by such monsters as still hovered around us, though the noise of lowering the boats had scared them to some distance. I said as much to the coxswain, for so I must continue to call him. He looked me up and down with his evil grin, and from me he looked to Jacob.

"Stap my vitals!" said he, "if I have not for messmates a pair of milksoppers! You will be the death of me, Doctor Harry, if of none else. Well, well, only leave me alone, and I'll play the game for you.—Look you, my lad," he said to Benbow, "you seem an honest fellow, and there's my flipper on't; will you take me for your skipper and step straight into Barney Dickenson's shoes?"

The mate hesitated.

"His share o' the cargo, and a trifle over for the extra work," added his seducer.

"It's a bargain," answered John Benbow, and spat into the horny palm of each hand.

"Then we'll lay aft, my lad, and train that pop-gun on friend Benjy's nose."

"There's powder stored forrard of the main cabin, and boarding pikes ranged round its bulkheads," said Benbow.

"Ay, ay, and I reckon I see a stack of round shot yonder, very

convenient it will prove ; but away with you and up with a bucket, we must get her charged at once."

Honest John trundled off to do Corkran's bidding, and that worthy himself hurried to the poop, but not without a parting shot at Jacob.

"When you've done pumping yourself dry," said he, "you had best join the doctor here at another spell on the ship."

He winked wickedly at me, and was gone, cramming a couple of pistol bullets into his mouth, ready for spitting into the barrels of his barkers, and no wit affected by the shambles at his feet.

The smith, a picture of dejection and misery, looked up and blinked after his retreating figure.

"Curse him !" said Jacob Little, the only time I ever heard him swear.

"Come, come, friend !" I exclaimed, "there is truth in what he says, and 'tis no use being over squeamish in such a world ; do you fall to again, and I will help you as soon as I have looked to these poor fellows."

There were but two I could aid, and I did my best for them under the circumstances, and brought them water from a butt, which was lashed to the caboose. They stared at me in sullen wonder, but each grunted with satisfaction as he drained the pannikin.

Meanwhile Corkran and Benbow were preparing to receive our visitors. The former had possessed himself of Barney's trumpet, and, once the gun was loaded and trained, he sprang into the main shrouds, and bellowed out :

"Boats ahoy ! What boats are these ?"

In a moment every oar ceased to splash, and then I saw Benjy spring up in the stern sheets of the gig, and his shrill voice came floating over the water's stretch between us and him.

"Blood and bones !" he yelled, "but 'tis the Virginian !"

"Doctor Harry, Doctor Harry !" shouted Corkran, "he takes me for a virgin ! What think ye of that ?"

The man was irrepressible, Benjy and company had met their match, but more was to follow.

"Ahoy !" he cried again. "But that sounds like old Poll Scudamore's squeaky whistle. How is it with you, Benjy, my love, and when did you take to cruising in a gig ?"

I could hear the boat's crew guffaw, and the captain cursing.

"Ahoy!" bellowed Corkran for the third time. "Has brother Barney shipped with you, and if so, how's his jaw tackle?"

"Give way!" roared that worthy, and the gig shot forward.

"Fire!"

Benbow clapped a lighted fuse to the touch-hole, and the gun sprang back from the port. Never was a shot more effective. The loud report yet lingered in the air, the smoke clouds yet hung about the bulwarks, when the crew of the gig were being dragged into the other boats. The ball had struck her full, shivering her timbers and knocking her to splinters. One man at least was hurt, but little did Corkran care. He and Benbow were hard at work, sponging and reloading. They ran out the cannon again, but it seemed that the crews of the two boats remaining had not much stomach for the job. I did not marvel greatly when I saw an upright fin shearing slowly through the water, between them and the ship. Still, a little reflection would convince them that their wiser policy would be to make a dash and seize the *Kittiwake*, for a boat voyage in such latitudes was like to be a thing of horror. They appeared to be discussing matters, and all the time the vessel slowly drew away from them, there being sufficient wind puffs to stir her canvas, though without guidance she made no certain track.

Presently they started rowing again in a great hurry, and I perceived a band of ruffled blue on the sea surface beyond them. A breeze was fetching up from the north-west, and would afford us a means of escape. Already Corkran was holding up a wetted forefinger, and leaving Benbow at the gun, he ran to the tiller. The catspaws gained upon the boats, but the boats gained upon the slaver.

"Pump!" shouted Corkran, "she's too sluggish yet to stand a jabble," and Jacob and I once more fell to work with blistered hands and anxious hearts. I had no further time to note what happened. I felt the breeze strike the ship, and noted a gurgle and lapping at her forefoot. Again I heard the roar of ordnance and a shout from our pursuers. The sails cracked heavily against the masts, and there came a creaking and groaning from aloft as the tackle stretched and the yards swung to the wind.

The sound of shots fired from the boats reached me, and

Corkran's voice pouring out a flood of what I took to be blasphemy or mockery. The slaves, hearing the miserable clanking, set up their still more miserable howling, and to this babel of noises the deeply sunk ship slipped through the sea. My one wish was that the pumps might suck dry, that there might come an end to this throaty sobbing of the plungers, and the gurgle and the gush and the splash; but it looked as though we were striving to empty the whole Atlantic, that our pumps were drinking as Thor drank when he quaffed at the wine horn of the mocking giants. Our Thor, however, was none too easily conquered, and long after I had fallen exhausted, face downwards, he was heaving with might and main, tireless and magnificent in his endurance.

My brain kept no record of time; I was in an agony for breath, and praying that my shoulders and arms might be eased of pain. Still I knew that the *Kittiwake* was forging ahead, and as I began to recover and my heart ceased to throb like a pump piston, I suddenly heard that which told me we were saved. It was Corkran singing, rolling out a verse of that weird sea song of his, with which he had introduced himself to me long ages ago, as it seemed:

Sing hey! for the days in the open boat,
For the sun's fierce glare and the thirsty throat,
For the oars' long creak, and the broken rest,
And the fin of the shark on his ceaseless quest.

Ho, ho, ho!
Let the jolly-boats go,
Dead men above, and sharks below.

I got upon my knees, and looked astern. There he was, flourishing a hand in token of farewell, and with his head thrown back, singing lustily this song of derision, ay, and of prophecy. I staggered to my feet and gained the side. We were humming along merrily, and far behind us were two black specks tossing upon a lively sea, while borne on the strengthening wind there floated to my ears an outcry of rage and dismay.

"God help them!" I said to myself, yet did not forget how He had helped us in His own good time, and for His own good purposes.

CHAPTER XV

AT LOGGERHEADS

LIKE an automaton Jacob bent and straightened at his task, but I was past helping him, and tottered aft with a request for our new commander. The poop stairs well-nigh foiled me, so weak did I feel, but I climbed them panting, and reached the stern.

"Corkran!" said I.

"Captain Corkran, and it please you," said he, with a sudden assumption of dignity.

"I do but save my breath," I answered, leaning heavily against the side; "but are we going to leave these men to their fate?"

His face was a picture.

"By old Daddy Neptune!" said he, "what would you be at next? Are we to offer them a passage at so much a head, and give up our cabins, with much bowing and scraping, to Poll Scudamore and long-tongued Barney?"

I shook my head.

"The crew," I answered, "are not bad fellows, and think of what awaits them!"

"Think?" quoth he fiercely. "Do you imagine that I do not know? Have I not had a tongue like leather, and eyes like hard glass balls with red streaks painted on them, and a throat afire, and a belly like a bottomless pit? Stap me!" said he, "but I have been five-and-twenty days afloat in a leaking dinghey."

"Then there is all the more reason why you should be merciful."

"You are a fool, Doctor Harry—a big man with a woman's

heart ; but I will humour you. How, think you, could I, with such a crew, wear ship and run down to them, or how even lie head to wind with the hold awash and let them come aboard? No doubt you would have me rig the side ladder, and turn out a black guard of honour. Yonder swine are not fit to handle a fine craft ; but, for your satisfaction, cast your eyes to the norrard there."

I looked, scanning the whole horizon, but saw nothing.

"Eyes like a bat, my lad ; so much for hunching over books o' nights. What's the mate's name?"

"John Benbow."

"Ho, there, Benbow ! Fetch up the glass, like a good lad, and we'll let Doctor Harry here squint through it to ease his pains. He has a sneaking fondness for B. and B., and would take them to his bosom, though they are as damp as floating sea-wrack."

Honest John obeyed with alacrity, grinning the while ; and it was then I made out the topsails of a ship rising above the ocean's rim.

"She'll sight 'em," said Corkran, "and no doubt feed 'em and coddle 'em, and wake one fine morning to find Benjy squeaking orders on the poop. He's no fool, is Poll Scudamore ; but I would that first ball had taken the head from off his shoulders. Curse him !" he added savagely. "I owe him a long score, and 'tis but paid in part."

He was in a very ill humour, and I forbore from questioning him on the subject.

"I opine," said he, "you had not fathomed these villains' intentions regarding you and yonder great sniffing lump, else you would not be so eager to embrace them."

His words angered me.

"Look you, my man," I answered, "you mistake an ordinary compassion for weakness. Once and for all, Jacob Little is my friend ; and you will address him—yes, and myself also—with fitting courtesy !"

"Ho, ho !" said he. "Split me ! but I like you, Doctor Harry ; even as I did when you laughed out amongst the snow.

I love a man with a backbone, even though he has a heart like a squab. Never fear, my hearty; we are four in the same boat, and must pull the same stroke, and there's my flipper on't."

It was impossible to cherish anger against such a being, and our fingers met in amity.

"It was not Benjy and Barney for whom I pleaded," I made haste to explain.

"I should reckon not. Why, doctor, they were for carrying you and Master Jacob Little (who, I remember, is your friend, and is the best hand at the pumps I have ever seen)—I say, they were for shipping you to the Western Indies, and there selling you to the planters. That was their little game, and it's well for both of you that a certain Corkran was stowed away in the forehold."

I confess I was not much surprised at this revelation.

"So we were never bound for Bantam?" said I.

"Bantam! No, no, my lad, you were bound to be bondsmen had I not drilled a couple of planks like a wood-worm."

"You!" I cried. "Then we did not spring a leak in the gale?"

He swore roundly, and laughed till his beard waggled.

"The tale will keep," he said; "and if we are to have the heels of yonder barque we must get more sail spread. Go now with the mate, and he'll teach you something of sea lore; but remember this, in all things pertaining to navigation I, and I alone, am master here."

"That I will not dispute," I replied; and never thought how soon I was to eat my own words.

It was a mere chance as to whether the *Kittiwake's* crew would be picked up or no by the ship which was growing big on the horizon, but her presence salved my raw conscience, and I had enough to occupy me in carrying out Benbow's directions. As for Jacob, he toiled unceasingly till the pump sucked dry, and the slaver was freed, and then he pitched the dead blacks overboard, and tended those he had hurt and the three who had been shot, with the care of a woman.

All the time I worked I was thinking of 'Corkran and his

remarkable revelation. His story was not incredible, but it argued a fund of endurance and resource, an ingenuity and tenacity of purpose which were indeed remarkable. I was all impatience to hear his tale, but it was some time before my curiosity was gratified, for we were yet in a parlous condition. Four men, and two of them landlubbers, were a ridiculously tiny crew for a craft like the *Kittiwake*, and when, in addition, it is remembered that we were burdened with a set of mutinous slaves, I trow none would have elected to change places with us.

As, however, some may anxiously await Corkran's explanations, I will here set them down much as he related them to me after we had passed through further adventurings, and before the dreaded sea-scurge settled upon us in all its loathsomeness.

"Ay, ay," said the old rip, to whom I had been recounting Captain Benjy's surmises anent the reason for his non-appearance, "Poll Scudamore thought rightly, for it would have meant a noose or a knife for me had I shipped openly with him and Barney. I reckon, howbeit, that I am too wary a bird to poke my beak into a trap, and though at first I had no suspicions, thinking this old girl was truly bound for Bantam, I had no sooner clapped eyes on her than doubts began to crowd into my mind. She has not the lines of an East Indiaman, and what is more, I recognised her, though she had changed her name. In my time—for I have footed her planks before—she was called the *Bird o' Paradise*, though she was more of a floating hell than a heaven.

"Well, my lad, I took the water the very night before you embarked, and crawled in through the hawse hole, a trick I have oft times played. I scuttled below unseen, and as soon as I smelt her timbers 'tween decks, I guessed her mission. Once a slaver always a slaver, as far as scent goes. Now, as I have said, I had, and still have, a long reckoning with the two ugly scamps we sent afloat. I might have knifed them on the quiet, but that's a dirty game, and though I have slain men—ay, a many of them—it has been as fairly as was possible. No, no, my cock, Corkran is no assassin. Therefore I devised the plan of lying hid in the store-room forrard. I had plenty of provender, and the air

was none so foul, while I could ramble in the dark through the lower hold, and passed the time in guessing what was in the bales and casks, now and then ripping one open to see if I were right. I had water from the storage casks, and though I came near being caught once or twice I ever saved my skin, knowing the run of the ship, and having a snug corner where I foregathered, as the Scotch say, with a dozen and more rats, and fed and fondled them. Split me! but a rat has more sense than many a Christian. Anyhow, he knows when 'tis time to clear, and my prick-whiskers trusted me to make a good job of my little affair. You and Jacob—confound the pair of you!—have spoilt it; but my idea was to let the slaves be shipped, and then at a convenient time, if possible after a gale, to start my boring. I made my plugs and waited. You know what happened, and you have some idea of the stench and heat. I opine I have as tough a stomach as any man, but, stap my vitals! I was fain to creep on deck o' nights whatever the risk. I grew bold, though I confess I played the fool that time you saw me. The beauty of the scene had gripped my soul, and I was busy with a poem on 't in my head. Ecod! I still recall a verse or twain."

Thereupon this remarkable man spouted forth a metrical eulogy on tropic moonlight, the which I have in great measure forgotten, and which has no bearing on this tale. It was, I remember, very musical, though, like all Corkran's songs, there was something of the horrible and weird in it, a glinting of yellow rays on dead faces in a silent ship, and more to the same effect.

"Enough," said he, when he had finished. "The gale happened and I made play with the augur, but I tell you I was scared for once. The green sea came welling in faster than I had thought possible, and when it was time to plug these same holes I thought I was cornered, hoist on mine own petard, Doctor Harry, floated up on my own in-lettings which were like to choke me. Yes, I had to swim down there in the darkness, swim, and dive, and grope and grip the ship's ribs under water. Body o' me! never have I been in such a fix. That is why I was dripping wet, my cock, and faith! you all came precious near to being in a

similar plight, for I could not strike the last hole and was in torture. Ay, ay, death's an easy thing in the open, or in the heat of a fight, but in a stinking hold, in the blackness of a ship's bowels, to drown like a rat, and see nothing as you drown, no, no, that is never the game for old Nick, never again !”

He shuddered at the recollection, and tossed off a finger's length of rum punch which he had brewed, for despite my warnings he drank freely as long as he was master of the *Kittiwake*.

Not master of a slaver, for all that. I have hinted that there had been a dispute between us, and it befell in this manner.

To put a period to a yarn which threatens to become wearisome, let me say that we ran the strange sail out of sight, altered our course in the night, and in the morning had the wide ocean to ourselves. Then, as was very necessary, we held a council which, as was perhaps very unwise and unnatural under such conditions, became a council of war. It was a fine day with a six-knot breeze, before which we ran easily due south, and we conversed together on the poop, Benbow at the tiller, and Corkran keeping a watchful eye on sky and sails. By this time the smith had ventured below, and had fed and watered the blacks, who at first had been paralysed with fear when he came amongst them, dreading lest he should deal with them as he had done when we stood at bay.

He and I had talked together, and decided on our course of action ; but, as we soon found, Captain Nicholas had not been idle. He also had a plan. What is more, he had liquor in him. His long abstinence had tried him sorely, and he had taken kindly to the bottle. Consequently, his easy familiarity was gone ; he was the fine gentleman, much to Benbow's astonishment, who did not know him as I did.

“Gentlemen, said he, “I need not long detain you. We have merely to settle some matters, such as the keeping of the several watches, who is to act as cook, the tending to the wants of the black ivory below, and the other duties of the ship's company. John Benbow, being a seaman to trade, will act as mate ; Doctor Mortimer I appoint surgeon and boatswain—a double office for a man of parts,” he bowed to me ; “while Master Jacob Little will

constitute our crew, and a more able-bodied tarry-breeks I have never seen."

Then he assigned us our various tasks, taking a very liberal share of work to himself, so much so that I wondered when he would find time to sleep.

He finished his dispositions with a prodigious yawn.

"That is all, my merry men," said he, "save that as we have had a trying bout, and as I am very well pleased with you, the bosun will pipe all hands to grog. A thimbleful will put heart in us, and God knows we have need of it or ever we come to an anchorage."

"Where, captain?" said I.

"Well," he replied, "you have a right to know, so learn, all three, that I will shape a course for Barbadoes. There we can get rid of the slaves at fair prices, re-victual, pick up a few hands, and then—hey for the Cape!"

He slapped his thigh, and had to bend his elbow to do so, his arm was of such a length.

There was a dead silence when he had finished, save for the usual ship-board sounds, the crisp swishing alongside, the sea music in the shrouds, the rush of the breeze striking the bellying sails.

He glanced at us sharply, and the scar on his face changed in colour, a trick it had when he was moved.

"Will that serve you?" he asked harshly.

"No," I answered, "it will not."

"Zounds, sir!" he cried. "And why not—why not? Body o' me, and am I to have rank mutiny already? Did you not say that there was to be no disputing with me on matters of navigation?"

I bowed, acting the part of the surgeon, and not that of the boatswain.

"'Tis true enough," said I, "and it pains me to break my word, but this thing was unforeseen."

He placed his hands on his hips and faced us squarely, with a sour look on his peculiar visage.

"Stap me!" said he, "if I am not in very truth in Poll Scudamore's shoes, which would thus early be at their pinching ;

but go on, bosun, where in thunder would you take the old *Bird o' Paradise* ? ”

“ Captain Corkran, we have every faith in your seamanship ; we owe you much ; we would willingly follow your lead ; but, sir, we have seen enough of this cruelty and misery. Master Little and I are for putting back and setting these wretched beings ashore in their own country. Thereafter let us make for the Cape by all means.”

The eyes of Captain Nicholas well-nigh leaped from out his head in pure amazement.

“ Do I hear aright,” he asked, “ or am I deaf as a mole from living in the dark ? Did ever any one listen to such insane folly ? Here be three hundred guineas waiting to be scooped, and we are to pass them by ; for what ?—for what ? For the maddest whim that ever tickled a landsman’s sodden brains. Split me to splinters if ever I dreamed of such pedantry ! You would give up a fortune for what—for what ? For the sake of running back to a God-forsaken, stinking, fever-stricken belt of coast, and letting loose a cargo of beastly blacks, to be nabbed by some swine of a Portuguese, or to rouse every frizzled poll in the bush with the hope of loot. And after that you say ‘ Hey for the Cape ! ’ By Daddy Neptune, will you find the wind, will you bargain with the sea-currents ? Man ! man ! John Benbow there could tell you what the doldrums mean. Would you have the sea slime coat us ? Would you have every barnacle in the tropics sucking at our bottom ? Do you wish to rot in a blue haze, and float on a pond of oil ? Doctor Harry, you are a fool. All the way from the Western Isles we carry the trades with us ; we run on a bowline ; we foot the circle from Rio ; we will have shipped a fresh crew ; there will be green meat and juicy fruits to keep our blood from turning sour ; we will jingle the yellow boys in our pouches, and again you will be passengers, and feed on the fat of the land. The first run, I grant you, will be longer, but I at least am not a chicken at heart or a chicken at sea, and stap my vitals if I grant you a jot or tittle ! No, no, bosun, pipe to grog, and then away forrard with you, and whistle for the wind to hold and blow us to Barbadoes.”

I listened to this tremendous harangue unmoved. I knew my man, and I knew he lied, or thought I knew. He was throwing dust in our eyes ; doing his best, and a very fair best at that, to scare us. The gleam of gold was before his eyes, the tinkling of coin in his ears ; and perhaps more than all he was merely set in his own way, and having made up his mind, was fiercely averse to altering it.

"Your arguments do you credit, sir," said I, "but, with all due deference to your opinion, we are not fools. One may fall in with calm latitudes voyaging half over the world just as much as beating down the African coast. Perchance you do not know how much was hove overboard and taken in the boats. I tell you we run the risk of starvation, as well as of the scurvy. As for time, 'tis much of a muchness whichever way you take it, though from what I know of the chart it will be somewhat in favour of our plan, everything considered. We stand more chance of falling in with ships on the direct run, and in any case are but a few days' sail from land if we go about. Our desire, and yours also, I take it, is to reach the Cape with all speed. We are not mariners, and are sick of the sea, and, as I said before, we are sick also of that shambles below deck. Further, the slaves constitute a danger to four wearied men, and we get rid of them speedily by turning back. As for gold, you once told me it weighed not a scruple with you ; why, then, this eagerness to make a profit of human lives ?"

Thus I spoke, and even at greater length ; and, though I say it, I had him on the hip in several particulars.

'Tis needless to say we wrangled. Benbow chopped about from one side to the other like an unmanageable barque, and words ran high, but it was Jacob who settled matters.

"This is all nonsense," he remarked quietly ; "we are going back to Africa, so let us waste no more time," and somehow, after we had all three stared hard at him, there seemed to be nothing more to say.

To my surprise Corkran gave way, but I fancy he saw some truth in my remarks, though he was not willing to own himself in the wrong. There can be no doubt that the man had a soul too

great for his body, as he had once before exclaimed. He was a cunning dog, however, and had enough real greatness to show no sign of chagrin, and even to make me feel uncomfortable the while he conformed to our ideas.

"I had judged you by other men," said he, with a sneer, "who take what the gods send, and ask no questions. I had forgot that I was dealing with gentlemen of the very highest order, and passengers who have paid for their rights. By all means let it be as you will. Doctor Harry, you once did me a good turn, and I have not forgotten it ; no, not I, so we will foot it to the east, and may God have mercy on our souls !"

His conclusion was in keeping with his behaviour. It put the fear of death upon Benbow, and cast a gloom upon us all, so that it was a very sullen company of four who worked the *Kittiwake* back to land. Corkran sneered at us the whole time, quietly but effectively ; honest John was depressed and mournful with a presentiment of evil ; and I was irritated and had doubts as to the wisdom of our conduct. Jacob alone was unconcerned. He did the work of the crew ; had the slaves up on deck in batches, where they squatted in the sun and drank in health and strength ; he set them to clean out their filthy den, and obtained an influence over them in a couple of days, though he knew not a word of their lingo. It is my belief that he was in part doing penance for the fit of rage and lust of blood which had come upon him. His was a strange character which I never fathomed. There was much of the child in him—much that was primitive and simple. He was pious in his own fashion, stupid, if you will, and yet no fool ; a queer mixture which it is as hard to describe as it was difficult to understand. This world would be a poor place did it harbour no eccentrics, and certainly I found it sufficiently exciting when I had to deal at one and the same time with two such originals as Jacob the farrier, and Corkran the Coxswain.

CHAPTER XVI

THE GREAT APES

LAND ho ! It was from Benbow that the hearty hail rang out at sunrise, and we gathered in the bows a set of unshaven, wearied men, to whose hearts came a glow at the thought of *terra firma*.

There were others on the deck—three stalwart blacks, who, conquered by Jacob's kindness, had joined the ship's company, and, like children, had forgotten their troubles and revelled in the novelty of their work. It was a heartsome sight to see their faces wrinkle, and their mouths expand with merry laughter—to watch their curious antics and mimicry of one another. There is something taking in the African ere the white man ruins him by his example, his cruelty, or his drink. These were intelligent fellows who readily understood their duties, and were faithful to their salt, as the Eastern fable says.

The winds had been light and fickle, and the days had lengthened out inordinately ; but past troubles were forgotten, and we felt drawn towards one another even as we drew near to the shadowy, broken line, which lay low on the ocean's rim. The hours passed, and once again we gazed at 'yellow sand-reaches, and a forest fringe from whose leafy roof a few bluish vapours slowly wavered towards the sun and melted at his touch. The lazy rollers broke in silver on the shore, and there was never a sign of life, not even sea-birds hunting for their prey. Neither was there a river mouth nor any sign of bar.

Corkran scanned the coast with a hand above his eyes, and shook his head.

"I know not the place," said he, "only that we are well to the south of the Ogobo River."

"It may be," I hazarded, "that one of our slaves knows."

"Very like," assented Benbow, "I will go and see."

The mate had a smattering of several of the littoral dialects, and could make himself understood. He went aft to where our sable gentry were jabbering together, and pointed to the shore. I looked at the group and noticed, as I had not done before, how very prominent a part his joints play in the configuration of the negro. Knees, ankles, elbows, knuckles : they all caught the eye, the bone ends being prominent ; but I may not dwell upon a consideration appertaining solely to mine own profession.

Honest John presently returned, stolid of aspect, and yet with news which, had I known nothing, would yet have excited me.

"One of them, whom we call Corrobee," he announced, "says this is the region of the great apes. The others know nothing of it."

The region of the great apes ! Where had I heard the like before, where had I read of such a place ? I cudgelled my brains, and presently the recollection came home to me. Amongst my store of books, which I fervently hoped that the vicar had in his safe keeping, was one I had unearthed in the ancient town of Antwerp, a very strange volume bearing the high-sounding title of "The Periplus of the Erythræan Sea." It was the edition of Stuckius of Zurich, of the year 1577, and full of curious legends regarding ancient voyages, though more especially did it deal with the adventurings of the Arabians from Myos Hormes in the Red Sea to Rhapta, a spot in the latitude of Madagascar. Thus it was concerned with the eastern coast of the unknown continent, but there was, I remembered, one passage which referred to the wondrous travels of Hanno the Carthaginian. At once I was on the right track ; the thought of the Periplus carried me to the books of Pliny, and my memory cleared. That historian, who was a very great liar as well, recounted how the men of Carthage made the land at a spot far south on the mainland, after they had traversed the narrow waters at the Pillars of Hercules, and sailed many days and nights. At this place, where were dense forests

and wooded bogs, they had encountered huge, hairy men and women, whom they had striven to take alive. In this they had failed, each of these monsters having the strength of ten men; but they had slain three, finding, indeed, they were immense apes of an extraordinary likeness to human beings, apes which fed on leaves and berries, and were much feared by the barbarians. They had skinned the carcasses of the three, and brought back the hides as an offering to the shrines of their gods.

I confess I had looked upon all this as an idle tale, an entertaining fable, and with some reason, for Pliny, the specious rogue, carried his hero in some mysterious way across to the Red Sea, and that though he never made him pass the Equator. So much for Hanno's Commentaries and a love of ancient lore; but what did this mean, this statement of the negro?

I got Benbow to question him again, and thus elicited a little further information. Corkran was for learning if we were far north of a certain cape, being perplexed as to his longitude; but of this the black was utterly ignorant. We gathered, however, that we were south of a river called by the Portuguese the Fernand Vaz, where there were native villages, and many tribes with kings. How was he aware of this? we asked. Simply because he had been taken prisoner in battle by men who ate human flesh, but from whom he had escaped, and wandering south had entered the "ngilla" country, as he called it.

"Ngilla!" I cried, when I heard him so say, "by all the fiends! the apes of Pliny were called gorillas!"

"Ecod!" said Corkran, "I am convinced these be the same Pongos of which I have heard in Angola, who swing from branch to branch, and clutching the hunter by the hair of the head, draw him upwards, and then rip him open or crush him to death. There are none such at the Cape or in Terra de Natal."

"This seems a cheerful place at which we have arrived," said Jacob, who was listening open-mouthed.

"Thanks be to you," snapped Corkran, whose good humour had not fully returned.

The smith beamed on him, and never uttered a word. His was a most effective method of turning aside anger.

We endeavoured to discover how the negro recognised the place, which to our eyes had no distinguishing feature, but Corrobee shook his bullet head and tapped his forehead, as though to say the knowledge was within, and would stay there. I was now full of interest; my imagination took fire, and I stared long and steadfastly at the dull green fringe, as though I would pierce to its depths and explore its mysteries. I scarce thought that I was yet to do so in some measure. The wind would not serve us for the north, and as we were only desirous of finding a safe landing-place, and had no wish to encounter traders or natives in force, we stood south, and towards nightfall were off a spot which seemed suited to our purpose. The shore trended sharply seawards, and sent a spit of high ground running out as a promontory to the north. This formed the outer barrier of a cove or small bay, into which we hoped to run the ship, there being still water at its entrance. And we did so, Benbow in the chains with the lead, Corkran at the tiller, Jacob, myself, and the slaves ready and alert to swing the yards or furl sail. We found a good depth of water and a shelving shore with a shingly beach. What is more, there was good holding ground, and we cast anchor and breathed easily, for it is a ticklish matter gliding over unknown shoals where the deep hue of ocean is lost, and a muddy green replaces the glorious blue colour that sailors love.

We said nothing to the slaves, fearing to excite them, but the poor creatures smelt the land, and noticed the stillness of the ship, whereat they set up a great and joyous clamour, for Jacob had given them to understand they were going home.

"Home!" said Corkran sourly. "Half of them will starve, and the wild beasts will take toll of them, and the wilder cannibals have them in their cooking-pots. I ask you what will the Pongos say to this invasion of their land? No, no, you had better have been content with Barbadoes, my masters."

To tell the truth I began to think he was right, but I thought otherwise the next morning when we brought them up in batches. Their eagerness was a sight to see, they came crowding from below, breathing hard, with faces aglow, with shouts and cries,

and we had much ado to deal with them in small detachments. Once on deck, and as soon as they had clapped eyes on trees and solid earth, they danced and leaped into the air, and behaved as though they were exceeding drunk. They knelt to us and kissed our feet, at least they would have done so, but Corkran kicked them out of the way, calling them swine and cattle, and guineas lost, and the rest of us avoided them, for, to tell the truth, they stank most foully. For all his hardness and gruffness, I think my old man of the sea was not so very averse to the spectacle. It was a new phase of life to him, and I saw his mouth twitch and the scar on his face change colour as he watched the extravagant happiness of those Africans. Somewhere I think he had a heart not wholly seared and shrivelled by the fires of temptation and the hot passions of a fierce and roving life.

There was no difficulty in getting the slaves ashore. They took matters into their own hands, and went themselves, plunging over the side like water-dogs, and making for the beach. Every one of them could swim save those who were ill or weak. Two of those who had been wounded in the fight had died, but the others had recovered so that they could walk. One, whose leg had been broken in the gale, had been killed by his fellows, and at his own desire, for such was their custom. Being without lethal weapons they had choked him, a very horrible form of death as it seemed to me. Such, however, are the tragedies of a slave ship.

We had no boat, but we constructed a simple kind of raft, on which we conveyed the helpless and the crippled to land, taking as much food as we could spare them, and once ashore their antics were laughable to watch. They threw the sand into the air, they buried their faces in it, they rolled on it, they seemed as though they could not get enough of the land smell into their nostrils; it appeared that the earth touching their flat soles was not sufficient. They were in an ecstasy, but sobered down at last, bade us farewell, and trooped into the woods, going we knew not whither, nor, for that matter, did we greatly care. All the time we had taken the precaution of being well armed, for savages

are apt to be treacherous, and there was much aboard the *Kittiwake* that would have enriched them beyond their fondest dreams of avarice.

There remained behind Corrobee and his two mates, who expressed their willingness to voyage farther with us, being tempted by the thought of regular meals and decent treatment. For our part we were glad to have them, and promised them a wage did they serve us faithfully. It was curious to think that they had no idea of our destination, and never troubled their heads about it. The negro is very largely a creature of the present. So, indeed, was I for the nonce, letting my thoughts range no farther than the forest which ended at the shore in bush and low scrub, and was screened by a multitude of creeping and twining plants, which festooned the branches and trunks of the tall, straight trees. For a time I had to be content with viewing them from a distance.

Corkran's plugs had served us so far, the weather having been calm, but he was intent on making the ship sound, and all day we were at work. We careened the vessel, shifting her ballast and what cargo remained, and wrought at the timbers inside and out, making free use of canvas soaked in pitch. It was then I realised what old Nicholas must have endured, and the full extent of his fortitude. Let any who have laboured in a slaver's hold within the tropic belt bear testimony. What had at first helped him was his mass of sticky drug stuff, which was a product of Arabia, but he had finished it the day after we left the Ogobo, and then his endurance had been taxed to the uttermost. To tell the truth I would have liked to investigate the effect of his medicine on myself, though I opine it was of the nature of bhang, a hemp of India.

I had more need of something to allay the heat, which was of a truth overpowering, despite the sea breeze. The sun's glare on the sand pained our eyes, we dripped with sweat, and the moisture of our mouths dried up, and became thick and stringy. We made us hats of broad leaves, and thereby gained some comfort, but we hailed the still mysterious night and the land breeze, soft and scented, with unfeigned pleasure. Next day our

forces were divided, Corkran, Benbow, and two of the blacks remaining by the ship and cove by way of guard, and to search for water, while Jacob, Corrobee, and myself set out to explore the leafy depths and look for fruits and any game that might be edible. We went armed with a musket and a hatchet apiece, Jacob discarding his hammer on that occasion, much to his subsequent regret, while the negro bore a netted hammock on his shoulders in which to carry our spoil. It was a mighty relief, and at the same time a strange experience, to plunge from the full blaze of sunshine into the gloom and closeness of the forest. And what a forest!

Coarse grass matted the ground, creepers ran like snakes hither and thither, and covered fallen tree-trunks and mouldering logs. Plants sprang upwards, spiked or branched, some with thin, drooping fronds, others with pulpy leaves coated with gum-like juice. Here and there, like stars set in a firmament of green, white blossoms gleamed amongst the foliage, now and then we encountered hanging masses of scarlet and of purple. There was no path, but in parts the growth was sparse and marching easy, in other places we had to hew our way, cutting strands of vegetation which parted like tense cables, and forcing through thick, smooth-stemmed brake. More than once a snake glided from before us, and I saw one reptile hanging like a thick, brown and withered tendril from a bosky branch. Had it not moved with the easy grace of a serpent I had passed it by unnoticed. As it was, I severed its wedge-shaped, hissing head from its squirming body with one blow of my axe. I forgot discomfort in ceaseless wonder at the vagaries of plant life, and its amazing profusion. Here Nature had sown with a lavish hand, and to what purpose? Verily it was hard to tell, for we saw scarce an animal or bird, and every sign of the decay of years, the rottenness of ages.

Whenever, by gestures or otherwise, I questioned Corrobee as to the 'ngillas, he replied, "Ivolo, ivolo," which, as I am about to show, are the wooded bogs where these astounding creatures love to dwell. Some, I doubt not, will class me as a Mandeville or second Pliny, but I write in sober earnest; and how are those

dead dogs who never stir beyond the sight of their chimney smoke to sit in judgment? What do such home birds know of the works of the Almighty, of the magnificence of far countries, of the secrets of distant seas, of the marvels of such a mighty continent as this of Africa? Let them break their mother's apron-strings; let them shake off their village dust and fare foreign as I have done. Then, indeed, they may speak if they will; but I trow they will be glad to hold their tongues, and thank God silently for perils past, and the glimpse they have had of things which are beyond our feeble imaginings and understandings.

After a time we were utterly exhausted, but we reached a glade for all the world like some English park, in which were clumps of spreading trees, and which was studded by wild-flowers of every colour till it looked like one of our fen meadows in the sweet springtime. It was there, as we rested, that we saw a troop of monkeys swinging past upon a journey. They chattered at the sight of us, and made a prodigious noise amongst the leaves. Corrobee was keen we should shoot at them, giving us to understand they were excellent as food; but I had not the heart to fire at creatures which had the faces of infants—no—nor the stomach to eat them. We swallowed the provender and drank the water we had brought with us, and did not stir till it had grown cooler. Then we penetrated a little farther into the heart of the forest, and straightway met with a surprising adventure. It was very quiet, for the incessant hum of nocturnal insects had not yet begun. No bird called bell-like from the bush, no creature gave tongue. I began to think the little monkeys had the whole vast domain to themselves, when suddenly there reached us the sound of a snapping branch. The negro stood still.

"Ngilla!" said he, in a hoarse whisper.

We advanced in the direction of the noise, treading softly, and all at once Corrobee, who was leading, pointed to the ground, which was beginning to be soft and moist. Upon it were imprinted four separate marks, which I inspected. Two might have been made by heels pressed downwards by a heavy body. The other two, each composed of four separate depressions, puzzled me, till the negro closed his fist and turned it downwards.

Then I perceived they must be the tracks left by the knuckles of huge hands. We were beyond a doubt in the region of the great apes.

"Ivolo!" said our black bearer, waving a hand in front, and I shook with excitement as I heard the crash of some heavy body not far from where I stood. The negro signed to us to be very silent, and led the way, following the trail of this monster, which had but recently been creeping amongst the undergrowth. I looked at Jacob. He was a mass of sweat and scratches, but followed me doggedly, though I knew he did not relish this woodcraft as I did, and was itching for a sleep, being as a rule phlegmatic as a Dutchman in these hot latitudes.

There was need of caution. Corrobee had imitated the method in which these apes attack, which seemed to consist in a swift rush, a ripping blow, and a rapid retreat; so that any moment one of them might make for us, springing from out the wilderness of foliage by which we were surrounded. Further, I recalled Corkran's tales of the Pongos of Angola, and kept a look-out for danger lurking amongst the branches overhead. So we moved onwards, every muscle on the stretch, our eyes glancing in all directions; and then, immediately in front of us, there ensued a tremendous commotion. Leaves rustled, wood cracked and splintered, there was the noise which branches make when suddenly let go and when they fly up amongst their fellows, the sound of heavy bodies rushing in haste through the forest and thudding to earth; yet so thick was the green screen that we could see nothing. The negro, however, sprang forward, and I followed him. We ran hotly in pursuit, tripping, breathless, cut in the face by twigs and thorns, but we were rewarded.

Suddenly we emerged upon an open glade where the ground was swampy and the trees sparse. Across this open space, hanging downwards by both arms from the boughs, swinging in a most ungainly fashion from limb to limb, and yet progressing with great rapidity, went well-nigh a dozen extraordinary creatures. In a moment I recognised they were the hairy people of Hanno, the huge apes of Pliny and the Periplus, the 'ngillas of the natives. Most had their backs to me; some I saw in profile;

one gazed at us over his shoulder, but he ran on the earth on all fours, his thick arms of an enormous length thrust straight out before him. Their squat, unwieldy bodies were covered with brown hair save in the middle of the back, where was a black patch of bare hide, and, as I found thereafter, it had a counterpart upon the chest. Their shoulders were hunched, their bellies protuberant, their legs short, exceeding massive and bowed like those of Captain Benjy or of Corkran. He who looked backwards at us was indeed repulsive and strangely human. The upper part of his face was a flat-sided ridge, and below its crest were set two small eyes, dark and wondering. Below these there projected a black nozzle, on the point of which were set two slanting nostrils, which quivered with surprise or fear. His mouth was open, and showed two terrible canine teeth gleaming against thick ebon gums ; while I could see that he had ears—little crinkled ears—set far back in his head, in shape like those of a child.

I stood awestruck, gazing after these creatures, and perceived they had no tails, and that one of them, shorter and slighter than the others—believe me or not, as you will—clutched a babe to her breast, for she was a female and a mother. All the time they fled they made a loud clucking, alarmed noise, and he who ran on heels and knuckles stopped once, faced us, and drummed with clenched fists upon his bosom in evident rage. I made ready to fire at him, but ere I was prepared he turned and resumed his flight, and soon every trace of them had vanished in the recesses of the virgin woods.

I could scarce credit my senses ; but that proof might not be lacking, there were footmarks at our feet, and broken and stripped branches around us, and patches of red berries on which they had been feeding. Were these indeed apes ? I asked myself, or the ancestors of man himself ? The thought was impious, but, for all that, irresistible. The gait of these weird animals was perilously near mine own, their forms and faces human ; the female, which I had seen sideways, the image of some hideous hag. I passed my hand across my dripping forehead, and slowly regained my breath.

An exclamation from the negro roused me, and, following the direction indicated by his outstretched hand, I saw none other than Jacob Little, who had just emerged from one side of the glade. From the manner in which he looked about him, I perceived he had lost his way in trying to follow us.

"'Tis fortunate," thought I, "that he stumbled on this open place while we are still here"; and with that I "hulloaed" to him, for he was a considerable distance away, and would never have seen us if left to himself.

He heard me, and at once came striding in our direction. Involuntarily I compared him with these gorillas I had seen. He was head and shoulders taller than any of them, and, being a man of exceptional size, might compare with them in girth and thickness of shoulder, while his legs were straight, and——

Thus I thought, and then ceased to think at all; for something else had come out into the open at the very spot Jacob had quitted. I gazed at it, wholly lost in surprise, stupefied with amazement, and my heart again started throbbing against my ribs till I could feel its beatings in my throat. As for the black, he threw himself down upon his face and wailed in mortal fear. And he had reason for so doing—his action was not without justification; for that which had all of a sudden stepped forth into the bright sunlight, that which must have been following the smith, that which stood, bowed and restless, at the edge of the forest screen, was either a white man or a white ape! I rubbed my eyes and looked towards it again. The figure reared itself, and started beating on its chest as the retreating pongo had done. I saw it more clearly, and was no longer in doubt. It was a gigantic ape of the same species as the others, but with this difference—whereas their body hair had been brown, the hue of withered leaves, this creature's hair, long and shaggy, was—believe me or not, as you will—well-nigh a pure white. Silvery grey is, perchance, a better term; but in parts it was indeed the colour of snow, tinged with a dull yellow, as though soiled. To be sure, I did not at once recognise these particulars. I only saw this gorilla was white, white and hideous; for his face, his breast and his hands were black.

"Could anything be more strange?" I asked myself. The ape had white hair, but so also had Jacob Little. The latter I knew to be an albino, but what was this dweller in the ivolo, this fearful and grotesque brute which haunted the wooded swamp? As I watched conviction came to me. There was that in the way it straightened itself which told me the truth. Its colour was that of old age. The creature was a veteran. Since then I have heard that amongst elephants it is the habit of an old bull to draw apart and live alone, morose and savage. So, no doubt, was it with this solitary apparition; it was in all probability a lonely outcast, a hermit of extreme age, which had tracked Jacob to this open space, plainly resenting the smith's intrusion into its domain.

The ape was angry, and though it has taken me much ink and time to recount these, my imaginings, concerning it, in reality they came and went like a flash, and I was shouting a warning to my comrade.

There was need. At the sound of my voice the animal dropped on all fours and made a rush at the man, its fore-arms fully stretched, its body sloping to its legs, which, owing to their shortness and crookedness, had a weak and impotent look, its face thrust forward, its mouth open, and its teeth visible. In height it did not reach to much more than Jacob's middle, but its bulk was vast, equalling, nay, even surpassing, that of the great smith, and no doubt making it appear shorter than it really was.

"To the side, spring to the side, Jacob, for your life!" I had the sense to yell.

The ape was taking him unawares from behind, but just before it reached him the smith obeyed me. His movement saved him. I saw the brute rear itself and strike out with both hands, its black fingers curved like a bird's claws, its trunk balanced on its bending legs. One huge paw caught Jacob by the arm, but the ape had overbalanced itself and fell forward. Probably, according to its custom, vouched for by Corrobee, it would have retreated, foiled in its attack, but that was not to be, for Jacob, whose vision was feeble in the bright light, seeing what he took to be a

hairy man trying to molest him, promptly grappled with the monster. He had lost his hatchet, and he threw aside his musket as a useless weapon. Had his familiar hammer been at hand I doubt not he would have dealt with the ape in a different fashion. As it was he gripped it with both hands by its hairy throat.

The smith told me thereafter that he experienced a terrible shock as he realised what he had tackled, as he felt the thick, hard cords which served the gorilla for neck muscles, the coarseness of its hair, ay, and the strength of its long arms as it clutched him to itself. Above all, however, the abominable foetor of its breath, the foul expiration of its old age, was what nearly conquered him. It turned him sick, even as astonishment unnerved him. Consequently, at the beginning, the ape had the better of the struggle; it held him fast and close, so that his arms being bent, he could not exert his full force upon it and thrust it away from him, and all the time it clawed at his back, rending the stout cloth of his clothes.

Then, however, it brought about its own undoing, for it started striking out with its feet, if one can so call them. It tore his breeches and scored the skin of his legs. The pain roused the smith, and in a moment he began to battle in deadly earnest. As for me, I could not fire, fearing to hit Jacob, while the negro was useless by reason of terror. Axe in hand I ran towards the combatants, and was witness of the fight. Jacob braced himself and began to overpower the monster. He pressed outwards with his arms and loosened its hold upon his body. Then he forced its head away, worrying at its throat, and shaking its head from side to side. Still it struck at his shins, and he had to drive his heavy shoes into it. His hat was gone, and it was extraordinary to see his white hair and contrast it with that of the ape. They began to stagger with the intensity of the contest, and, ere I could reach them, had collapsed, and were rolling on the ground, now the man uppermost, anon the ape. The latter was choking, and yet growling savagely, while he strove in vain to bite. I came up to them at last.

"Let me finish him!" I cried, though I dreaded striking the

man by mistake, they were so locked together in each other's embrace.

"No, no," gasped Jacob; "I shall master him."

He was bleeding, panting, in rags, but his spirit was indomitable. Yet I verily believe had this ape been in the prime of its life, in the full glory of its power and vigour, that Jacob had been dead ere I could have aided him. The creature was comparatively feeble, but I ask you how many men could have successfully encountered this old king of the forest? Its rage and despair were a sight to witness as it felt itself being vanquished. It struggled convulsively, its eyes bulged from its skull, it twisted and wrestled in an agony of suffocation. I am not minded to describe its end. I have seen old men die deaths which were not violent, and the sight is painful; imagine, then, what it was to see the breath squeezed and pressed and hammered out of the body of this old man of the woods.

"I shall master him," said Jacob, and he did so; but by the time the ape was still and stiffening the smith could only lie beside its hideous body, and gasp in a state of utter exhaustion.

For my part I could but marvel dully at the strange chance which had brought about the meeting of these twain, the white man and the white ape.

CHAPTER XVII

THE SKELETON AND THE SEA SCOURGE

As I have said, I am convinced that some who know no better will term me a liar, but I ask you, could any one not having witnessed such a scene as I have described, faithfully conjure up a vision thereof, and then proceed to give a picture of the fallen champion as I am about to do? I trow not.

Learn, then, that the dead ape measured twelve hands in height, judging him as we do a horse, had shoulders of prodigious thickness, a chest which must have been two yards in girth and had a framework of ribs in shape like those of a man's thorax, but the bones were very knobbed and massive. His arms, hard as steel bands, were well-nigh as long as his body, and ended in tough-skinned hands bearing each five black and wrinkled fingers. There was an ebon nail to each finger, and the thumb was set in opposition to the other four prehensile digits. The belly of the beast was paunched, but this part of its trunk was shrunken as compared with its chest and shoulders. Still more withered looking were its bent and stumpy legs; its feet were narrow and flat, and the big toe of each was placed far apart. It was clear that the brute was wonderfully fashioned for tree life, and I doubt not that such creatures, at home on the ground, at home in the air, armed with what are in very truth four gigantic hands, furnished with great teeth, though I question if they use these much in warfare, with arms of prodigious length and strength, and the power of rearing themselves erect, I doubt not, I say, that they are the most formidable foes on earth. They have the forest to themselves. Where they live, there do

they reign, and have reigned, and will reign till mastered by the master man, who, unlike Jacob Little, will, I fear, take an unfair advantage of these mighty berry-feeders.

The face of one of the 'ngillas I have described, that of our victim differed from it in some particulars. It was, if possible, more human, there being no bony crest to the skull, which was rounded; the skin of the nozzle was a yellowish black like stained leather, and the teeth were few and broken. Its whole aspect, indeed, was that of a Caliban. Canines it had, two great stumps, but they were blunted and chipped, and the colour of old ivory. A bristle of coarse hairs depended from the chin, for all the world like a beard. Hideous in life, the ape was still more hideous in death, and yet of an extraordinary likeness to some aged man. It was then I noted the hue of its shaggy coat, which hung on it in patches, and was grey and white, but of a soiled appearance, as I have stated.

So it lay, naked and grisly, and when Jacob had got back his breath and I had made shift to bind up his wounds as best I could, we set Corrobee to skin it. The native, who had approached the carcase timidly, on being convinced that the ape was dead, behaved as though he himself had slain it, singing a song of triumph, and taunting and kicking the motionless form ere he proceeded to make it yet more ghastly. I, who was versed in anatomy, marvelled afresh at its similarity to man, and was all eagerness to see the brain; but the hatchet edges turned on the dense skull bones and we had no saw. Furthermore, it was growing late. The darkness would descend suddenly like a mantle, and we had no fancy to spend the night in such a wilderness. Therefore, we merely secured the hide, which the negro, who now worshipped Jacob as a god, stowed away in his net, and we proceeded to retrace our steps. Without the black we had been lost, and in all probability would have perished miserably. Even as it was night overtook us, and the wonder of these high woods was intensified fourfold.

Now, indeed, there was evidence of life; the hum of insects, the croak of frogs, weird cries and calls, and the whisper of the land breeze stealing seawards amongst the tree-tops. Luminous beetles

The Skeleton and the Sea Scourge 193

like tiny floating lamps flashed amongst the undergrowth, in the coarse grass other lights glowed and winked, leaves and creepers rustled as creatures moved amongst them, and the blackness was such as could be felt. We halted and waited for the moon. She rose at length, and her pale light filtered down through the canopy of interlacing boughs till we found ourselves in a bower full of ghostly, shadowy radiance. Here and there a white tree stem glinted in the silvery rays, here and there was a glade bathed in glory, but for the most part we resumed our march through a world which looked unreal. The flying fires paled, the glow-worms quenched their lanterns, but the air continued tremulous with sound, and every swamp frog made hearty melody till their choruses were deafening. As I live I had to pinch myself to make sure I was not dreaming, or that all these things I saw and heard were not a mere phantasy of an overwrought brain. But no ; I had to aid Jacob, who was lame and crippled, and he was very solid flesh and blood. His eyes, no longer blind, for the first time took in the full wonder of the scene, and this helped him, I verily believe, to forget his injuries, for he was most patient and uncomplaining.

The negro led the way, flitting in front of us like some black fiend who had gained an entrance into paradise ; but as we were traversing an open space, dotted with earth hillocks thrown up by busy ants, he suddenly came to a standstill. We also halted, and, having done so, distinctly heard a very curious rattling, as though the wind were sporting with loosened portions of the bark of some rugged tree. To my surprise the sound approached us ; whatever caused it was on a journey. Corrobee made haste to hide behind an ant-heap, and we were fain to follow his example, wondering what new adversary we might have to face, what fresh adventure awaited us. After all it was nothing very deadly, at least not to us, though no doubt a cause of terror and confusion to those tiny toilers who laboured underground, and had reared these pointed and rounded structures behind which we sheltered. The rattling proceeded from an animal having an armour of scales, a short, thick-set creature, with a very lengthy snout and a thick tail. It came into sight, running quickly towards us, unconscious of danger,

and was of so curious an aspect that I was much diverted thereat. Unhappily for itself it sought to pass close by the negro, and in a moment he had leapt upon it, knife in hand, and had despatched it. He gave us to understand it was an ant-eater, and called, if my memory serves me, the ipi; but what was of more importance was that from his gestures we gathered that it was a most succulent dainty, though uninviting in appearance. Thereafter we put Corrobee to the proof, and I am free to confess that the flesh had the flavour of a fat capon, and comforted us in no small measure ere we harked back to the abomination called salted junk.

It will be apparent that we gained the ship in safety, and this is true, for we met with no further incidents, but were mightily glad to hear the booming of the surf, and catch a glimpse of the *Kittiwake's* tracery standing out against the moonlit sky.

I write for mine own delectation, and for that of a person who can never hear enough of my past career, but any other readers, should such exist, may very well say, what of this Empire of Monomotapa, this golden kingdom of which we hoped so much? Well, well, many another, my good friends, had hopes of the same place which came to nought, yet I shall not wholly disappoint you; but a little patience is a virtue indeed, though, mark you, we are even now bound aboard the *Kittiwake* for the Cape of Good Hope, intent on Corkran's quest. There is no need to be wearisome over an account of our reception by that same worthy and by John Benbow, of their interest in, and wonder at, the ape's raw hide, of the days we spent on land, of our setting sail once more, and of our steady voyaging to the south, after having filled our water casks with very doubtful fluid. It was weary work, and we suffered from loss of sleep and the heat, and occasional calms; but nothing of importance occurred, according to my diurnal, till we fell in with a certain being who was to play no mean part in our future welfare.

I was in the fore-top, a favourite perch, whence I could view the ship like a plaything beneath me, the ocean stretch around, and see the flying fish shoot from the surface and skim and splash like water fairies. Being thus idly occupied I spied afar off a black dot upon the sea.

The Skeleton and the Sea Scourge 195

"Poop ahoy!" I cried in true nautical fashion; "there is something afloat a mile or more off on the port bow."

"A whale, belike," bellowed Corkran, who was got up in some of Benjy's finery, and thus arrayed presented a most remarkable figure of a man.

"Nay," I shouted, "methinks 'tis too small, and there is no spouting."

"I will get the glass," replied our skipper, and vanished below.

He came aloft and joined me, though he could see the object from the deck. 'Twas then we made it out to be a boat, and, altering our course, steered for it, the wind being light and the sea calm. Ere long it was rubbing against our side, having so far shown no sign of life aboard it. We discovered, however, it was not wholly derelict, there being a man stretched full length in the bottom, a man who at first sight appeared lifeless, and no wonder. His face was turned towards us, and it was very nearly the face of a skull, save for the hair which grew upon it in the form of a bushy beard. The skin was a yellow parchment stretched tensely upon the bones, and following their configurations. It was consequently a face all ridges and hollows, a countenance with the forehead, the open, staring eyes, the nose, the upper part of the cheek bones, and the line of the mouth unduly prominent. The man who owned it must, moreover, have been of great height when erect, his length was evident as he lay beneath the thwarts. Further, he must have been a very large man when full fed and properly nourished. His mere bony frame clad in rich clothes which lay loosely on it filled the bottom of the boat. To my eye he appeared even then to equal Jacob Little in size. We had come upon the skeleton of a veritable giant; yet that skeleton had life in it, though there was nothing else in the boat. Benbow, who had leapt into her with a rope in his hand, detected as much, and I descended and verified his opinion. Before shifting the man I managed to force brandy down his throat, finding his lips cracked and brittle, and his tongue almost horny in consistence. He was perishing from thirst, even more than from want of food.

By my directions we hoisted him and the boat together, being very glad of the latter, which was sound. Her planking, however,

told some terrible tale of the sea. It and the thwarts and the stern sheets were crusted with a dark and sticky substance which stank vilely. I scratched it on the surface, and my suspicions were confirmed. At one time this drifting boat had been a shambles. The under surface of the man's clothes were stiff with the same material, but he had no wound upon him when we came to examine him.

I have said that save for its occupant and the spark of vitality which lingered in him, the boat was empty, but I was wrong. There were a few carpenters' tools in the locker, and beneath the man's body, half imbedded in the dried filth which covered the timbers, we found a knife, a long curved weapon with a handle of bone, on which were carved the letters J. van W.

"By the powers," said Corkran, when he saw it, "this man is a Dutchman."

Whatever he might be he was very nearly dead. Another day had finished him. I could not have believed such leanness compatible with life. Corkran, when he came to me, had been in good condition compared with this wreck of a human being. I tell the truth when I say that one could feel his spinal column from the front. His very emaciation, however, enabled one to fully appreciate the scale on which he was built. I could handle his bones, ay, and they filled the hand. Were his muscles in fitting proportion he would be worth the saving merely to have the chance of seeing them develop.

Jacob took a lively interest in our waif when he perceived his possibilities, and I understood his anxiety. The idea was grotesque, but the skeleton benefited thereby, for the smith was unremitting in his attentions and wrestled for his life. Whether or no his care turned the scale in the man's favour I cannot tell, but, certain it is, our helpless giant began slowly to recover. Jacob, I have said, displayed the utmost solicitude regarding the castaway; but, for that matter, we were all interested in him. Any event which breaks the monotony at sea is welcome, and we were full of speculations anent this new-comer. The boat bore no name either upon her gunwale or on her stern, and we had no clue as to the nationality of the ship which had owned her.

The Skeleton and the Sea Scourge 197

Corkran would have it he was a Dutch merchant who had been bound homewards from Batavia with a fortune to his name. He took account of the richness of the man's dress, his feathered headpiece and the hunting-knife, whose handle was chased with silver, and which was such as a man might use in a wild and foreign land. More for the sake of argument than anything else, I took the opposite view, and affirmed he had been on a voyage to the Cape, like ourselves, and was a person of rank in the Netherland's company.

It was mere idle talk, but it served to pass the time as we sluggishly cleft the still sea surface, and saw the southern cross in the heavens, and the black, starless space in the vault which is its neighbour. Even yet I look longingly back on these cool, peaceful nights under the studded sky, the ocean silent as death, save where the *Kittiwake* sheered her way with gentle gurglings and splashings, and a rhythmic lap at her bows. Then with healthy breaths we drew long draughts of strong salt air, and our browned faces were fanned by cool zephyrs sporting lightly with our gallant ship.

By day it was different. The sun's glare wearied us ; the sameness oppressed our minds, and, perchance, some foreboding of the horrible thing which was to taint and sicken us haunted our wearied brains. We had no clue to the man's identity ; there were no papers in his pockets ; no name written on the lining of his hat. There was, however, one thing belonging to him from which I hoped much, and was, at first, disappointed. A locket of plain gold was hung about his neck with a cord of plaited hair, which I shrewdly guessed had formed the tresses of some dark maiden. So proper a man must needs have had his affairs, was my reflection. I took the liberty of opening the ornament, which had a simple catch, at a time when the fellow appeared to have only a few minutes to live. To my surprise it contained no portrait, nothing but a sheet of folded paper, which when I spread out I found to be blank, save for a single dark red and wavy line running obliquely, and, for a short distance, a little to the side of the middle of the sheet. Fearing the gold trinket might tempt one of our sable crew, I kept it by

me, intending to restore it to its owner, paper and all, should he regain his senses, though why any man should carry on his person a somewhat soiled piece of paper without a vestige of writing on it passed my comprehension.

As I have said, he began to mend; but, for a week or more, was in a stupor, and as he thus lay he muttered constantly to himself. The only words I recognised were these, repeated over and over again, "Verdoemde eerzucht!" which I knew to mean "damned ambition!" Was Corkran right, or was I? Did his wandering wits intend to express the futility of his struggles after wealth, or did they voice despair and chagrin at some great purpose frustrated at its outset? The problem was of interest. Would it ever be solved?

Heaven knows I soon ceased to care. I know not whether this man brought us even then ill-luck, or whether it was merely our protracted voyage, and the vileness of our provender and of our drink, the absence of proper sustenance, the eating of those weevils of which Corkran had prophesied, or some judgment of God upon us for our discontent, which was the occasion of our new misfortune. The sea scourge, the dreaded scurvy, soon had us in its grip. I had never seen this fell disease of sailors, and I have scarce heart to write of it.

Picture the misery of a complaint which creeps upon one slowly, like some crawling, evil beast, that saps the strength, and sends pains shooting through the muscles, which makes the skin yellow and branny till it is shed in tiny flakes. Imagine men whose lips become bluish in colour, and harsh to the tongue, whose gums grow soft, spongy, and swollen, and bleed of their own accord; ay, and become coated as though with a horrid fungus till their teeth loosen and rattle in their mouths, till the spittle runs freely, chewing is a torture, and the breath of the foulest. Nor is this all. What say you, my daintily fed masters, my satin-skinned dames, to hard, brawny masses beneath the cutis, which over them becomes purple, or green, or yellow, as though from a bruise or blow? Mayhap you think of the seaman battling with breaker and tempest, with the greedy fire, with the bloody pirate, or the fevers of foreign parts; but have you

The Skeleton and the Sea Scourge 199

ever considered him thus : breathless, fainting, perchance with an unholy greed for food he cannot eat, blind at night as a bat is blind by day, haggard, swollen, a mass of stinking ulcers, yielding up his blood at the bidding of the pestilence ? 'Tis a spotted horror, the very essence of loathsomeness, slow and sure, mysterious and deadly ; at least, save that it was far from slow, so it was with poor John Benbow. The poison fastened on him first, and he passed from bad to worse. In vain I treated him. I had heard that scurvy dragged out a long course, that it lasted months, and, even when far advanced, might be checked by the grateful juice of lemons. Juice of lemons ! We might as well have whistled for the juice of the forbidden fruit. I can only say that within a dozen days the mate, whose final symptoms were those of an apoplexy, had gone to his grave fathoms deep, sewn up in a hammock and weighted by a round shot. We had known him only a little time, but men grow friendly at sea, and in the midst of dangers, and we sorrowed at his loss. Let it be put on record that he died bravely, another stout mariner of England gone to that ocean bottom, which I trow will yet welcome more of his race than of any other that sails the seas.

We were becalmed, a stagnant ship, and, one by one, we all fell victim, all save Corkran. Even the negroes suffered, and one of them went mad and leaped to the sharks, for again these watchmen of the deep had scented us. All save Corkran, I say, and our passenger, who lay drowsy and stupefied below deck. Never had I admired the man from Virginia, the tough old sea-dog, as I did during those terrible days. He went without sleep, he tended us, he cheered us. As we grew down-hearted he waxed the merrier. He sang us the strangest and most laughable of ditties, he fired our enthusiasm for our quest. He pictured a glowing future, he scoffed at death, he made believe that our victuals were of the finest, that the broth he brewed for our aching mouths was a veritable nectar. He may have been a villain, a wild rip, a trifle crack-brained, but he was fearless, that finest thing on land or water, a dauntless man. He knew the scurvy, none better, and, as he said :

“Thank your stars, my bullies, that 'tis calm. Work and

scurvy cannot go on together, and I opine you have enough to occupy you. Stap me! 'tis I who am the idle fellow."

I believe he was right. I am convinced that our enforced idleness was the saving of us, the reason we took the disease mildly, and were not utterly overcome. Jacob was the worst of us, and he was very brave and patient, though he suffered much, especially in those parts where he had been torn by the gorilla's fingers and clawing toes. For all that I had a sufficient taste of the abomination to imagine what it must be in its severe form; and, indeed, since then I have seen and treated the crews of many ships which had been devastated by this foul plague.

It was fortunate that two of us were not prostrate when the wind caught us up at last, for it was a ten-knot breeze which came swooping out of the north and quickened the motionless ship to life and activity and sent her reeling and plunging to the south'ard, leaving a snow-white trail in her frothing wake.

Ere this occurred, however, ere we blessed blustering Boreas and had visions of a haven and succulent dishes and the breath of health, I had made a discovery.

It happened one hot, sultry afternoon as the odour of tar rose strong upon the air and filled our cracked and festering nostrils, that I sat idly on deck beneath a sail rigged up as an awning. Too weary to read in the book of Rhazes or my pocket Bible, too tired to rack my brains, I drew forth the locket of the castaway, and speculated thereupon. Again I examined the sheet of soiled and folded paper, turning it this way and that, holding it up against the light, but all to no purpose. I could only conclude that the man was a Catholic, who bore about with him some curious relic, some *agnus Dei* blessed by some prelate of his church. Weak and ill, I lapsed into an uneasy sleep, from which I was aroused by the sound of a voice crying, "A sail! A sail!"

Now here is a strange thing. The voice was that of Benbow, the mate, who slept fathoms deep beneath our keel. I staggered to my feet, and gazed about me with eyes which were bloodshot, but could see well enough even in strong light. Corkran was below, Jacob lay huddled close by me, the two negroes were sitting sullen in the bows. Our passenger I knew to be still unconscious.

The Skeleton and the Sea Scourge 201

Such are the facts, with this in addition, that though there was no sign of a ship, the still sea surface some cables' length from the *Kittiwake* was spreading in ripples as though a heavy stone had fallen upon it, parted it, and sunk beneath it. Moreover, there lingered upon the air the faintest trace of a very noisome odour, which overpowered even that of the all-pervading tar. I offer no theory, I merely state the matter plainly, and frankly own that I was ill, with tainted blood and crusted gums; but to me the voice was that of John Benbow, mariner deceased, and further my brain was unaffected, though, as I am about to show, I had good reason, a moment or so later, to again doubt the evidence of my own senses.

I had limped feebly to the side, and now leaned heavily on the bulwarks, watched the disturbance vanish. I even recall the fact that the circling wavelets splashed softly on the barque's side, from which the paint was peeling. That, however, is not the point.

I had passed from beneath the shade of the awning, and was in the full glare of the sun, which hung high in the hazy heavens, a glowing dull white ball like molten metal. Unconsciously I held the piece of paper from the locket so that it lay stretched out between my fingers on the ledge, and the light struck fiercely on it, till its whiteness pained my eyes, and the red, wavy line appeared green in colour. I blinked as though I were a second Jacob Little, and glanced away from it at the interminable sea, which stretched before me once again smooth and unbroken, though, as I have said, the air was tainted. Confused, yet questioning, I stood perchance three long minutes scanning the horizon, and then turned with a sigh, paper in hand.

Mechanically I looked at it, and what was this I saw? Where there had been no writing there were now words, where there had been a blank there was something drawn—something not yet complete, but visibly growing before my eyes. There was purple upon the paper, a purple ink which took the shape of letters in some parts, and in others that of lines which slowly increased in length, and became joined one to another.

I rubbed my eyes; I asked myself if I were mad? I held the

paper in the sun, deliberately remained blind, and slowly and carefully recounted to myself the main facts of the past three months. The sequence was perfect, my memory was good. I could reason, though my brain was languid; decidedly I was not insane. "Then," said I, "this is some passing hallucination bred of the scurvy," and opened my eyes.

Surprised before, I was doubly, trebly, fourfold more astonished at this second view I took of the contents of the locket. The sun had worked its will upon the paper, and at its bidding the secret had been yielded up in full, line had joined with line, figures had sprung into their places, names had become complete, chaos had given way to order.

An invisible ink, you say; we have heard of such, it is nothing very wonderful. That, my friends, I grant you. I also, was cognisant of such ingenious preparations, though I had never before witnessed the transformations they effect, yet that was but the slightest source of my amazement, for there before my eyes, in deep purple ink—believe me or not as you will—was something I had seen before, something familiar to me, something which had been an influence upon my life. It was the chart of Corkran the Coxswain.

CHAPTER XVIII

WE MAKE THE LAND

I PUT it to you solemnly, heard you ever the like? Is it any wonder that I stood stock still in the eye of the sun, with mouth wide opened, and a tongue, which, for once, forgot to try to moisten my blistered lips.

Truth is stranger than fiction. In my time I had read tales of curious coincidences, had listened to yarns anent queer encounters, but this surpassed them all. Here was a man, a Dutchman, belike, picked up by a chance ship, starving and athirst in mid-ocean, in the tropics, in a boat crusted with dried blood, and having nothing to identify him save a locket, a sheet of paper devoid of writing, and perchance a hunting-knife. And yet this very paper now plainly exhibited a replica of the chart which lay in the bauble hung in Corkran's beard hairs, in the trinket belonging to the Captain of the said vessel; was, indeed, almost identical with the geographer's plan which had largely helped to bring about the voyage of the said barque and was the main cause of the troubles of her company. It will be observed I have said "almost identical." It was therefore not an exact copy. For one thing the names were writ in Dutch instead of English, Cape was spelt Kaap, Good was Goed, Hope was Hoop. For another, the arrangement of places seemed, as far as I could remember, to be somewhat different, yet the essentials were the same; for example the coast line, the Portuguese titles, the pictures of animals and birds, and above all things the words Terra de Natal and Monomotapa. Further, and here was a mystery, the name

Camissa was scored through with that very red and wavy line which had constituted the sole mark upon the paper, and had a counterpart in Corkran's map. A few other facts I noted. Curiously enough to the north of Terra de Natal, between the words Cortada and Terra Alta, was set a purple cross and this inscription in characters the most minute—

Hier is de gulden stad van O.S.

which I took to mean, Here is the golden city of O.S, whatever O.S. might signify. By all the fiends! it was writ in the very spot which Corkran had indicated with his black-tipped finger-nail. Below it was a single word "Bossiemans" in large letters, and in similar type, and at another place I spelt "Inquas."

Stopping to read no more I folded up this precious document and tottered aft. I well-nigh fell down the companion ladder, neglecting in my haste to turn round upon it, and forgetting how feeble I was.

I saved myself, however, from a bad tumble and broke into the main cabin. There was the man I sought; a tuft of his coarse wig hair hanging over one eye, a glass of aqua vitae convenient at his elbow; his cheeks working as he chewed a quid, and before him upon the table my treatise on the fevers.

"Ho, Doctor Harry!" said he, scarce looking at me, for he knew my step, "see what I have found," and with that he began reading aloud the very passage I had chanced upon when awaiting an attack from Squire Pumphret and the villagers. He read slowly but correctly, yet with the most villainous pronunciation: "'Barbari tamen, nonnullis in locis cummen quamdam, ex arboribus lactam sese unguentes ad sua corpore adhibent, ut hunc in modum defensi, paludes incolumes transgrediantur.' Nor is this all," he cried; "I have discovered a description of these very trees. Listen!"

"Nay, nay!" I cried, "listen rather to me."

He looked up.

"By Daddy Neptune!" said he, "what's gone wrong, my lad? Hast seen a spirit?"

I told him all, and he sat and listened quietly. As I proceeded his eyes grew compassionate, and he shook his head.

"I have known it do this," he muttered.

"You doubt me?" I exclaimed, mumbling my words by reason of the soreness of my mouth. "You think the scurvy has turned my wits. Well, seeing is believing; and what say you to this?"

With that I spread the paper before him; and he looked at it, and nodded. I also looked at it, and uttered a cry far back in my throat. There was not a vestige of the chart upon it—nothing but the red and wavy line in the spot where I had seen drawn the course of the river called Camissa. My brain reeled; I looked helplessly about me.

"Why," I gasped, "it has faded! But come on deck—come on deck. We'll put it in the sun, and then you'll see."

"Ay, ay," he answered soothingly; "we'll on deck. But the sun is no place for you, my poor lad."

We mounted the ladder; and again I spread the paper, with hands which trembled a trifle, in the full, strong light of the afternoon. We both watched it intently, and the minutes sped. It was in vain. No specks or blotches, no lines, no writing—nothing, absolutely nothing, appeared upon it. I took it from off the wood, and held it up in the air. It made no difference.

"I told you the truth," I said desperately, feeling all the time as if I lied. "Look at the red mark!"

"Ay, ay; that's the cause o't all, I take it," he replied; and then he dragged me, protesting feebly, under the shade of the awning, and, deaf to my expostulations, he went and lowered a bucket over the side, and sluiced my head and neck with the sea water till I begged him to desist, owing to the smarting of my lips as the salt lodged in their cracks. The douche was warm, almost hot, but it did me good. It cooled my brain, and removed my anxiety to set myself right with Corkran. I knew that my reason was sound, that this surprising thing had really happened, but I found myself questioning as to whether or no it was the result of some concatenation of circumstances. It had followed upon the strange cry, the disturbance in the sea, and the noisome odour. Was it in any way connected therewith? I had dabbled a little in the occult sciences, and was aware that "there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in our philosophy."

It was, however, no use filling my mind with vague surmises. I reflected that the ink might be such as to respond once to the stimulus of light or heat, or whatever affected it, and only once. If so, what would the owner of the paper say? True, the whole thing had come about by chance. I had certainly tried to make out what the paper portended, but only with a view of establishing the man's identity in case he should yet slip through my fingers.

Circumstances had led me to a discovery. Of what? Was Corkran right, or was I? This castaway might have visited the city of gold, have secured its treasures, and been wrecked on his journey home, a man of wealth. This would certainly account for these oft-repeated words, "*Verdoemde eersucht*." Corkran might be incredulous, but I resolved to put our passenger to the test. There was no use our prosecuting a search after nothing, proceeding farther on a wild-goose chase. Again, the man might be our rival. He also might have intelligence concerning the true site of this land of treasure, and have been voyaging thither when calamity overtook him. If so, would it be wise to get him to join forces with us?

He did not look like a person who would relish being thwarted. His was essentially a strong face, despite its withered leanness. His forehead was broad, his eyes deep-set, his nose high-bridged and clean-cut. His great, rolling black beard was not the fluffy, straggling appendage of a weakling. No, our uninvited visitor was strong, for good or for evil; but it seemed to me that fate had perchance been kind enough to put him somewhat in my power; the mysterious paper might be a warning, might yet save us from folly or from danger.

So certain was I that my senses had not fooled me that after Corkran had left me I immersed the paper in the water remaining in the bucket, and again exposed it to the sun. It was not right. I had no business to take such liberties with the property of another; but, then, the conditions were peculiar. Great things might be at stake. It was no time for a tender consideration of the niceties of *meum* and *teum*.

The wetting was of no avail, and I cursed myself for a fool as soon as I found this to be the case. When dried the paper was

crinkled, and had a yellowish stain upon it. Its owner might guess it had been tampered with, and besides, I might have irrevocably ruined its value.

Disgusted at my thoughtlessness, I folded it, smoothed it, and thrust it back into the locket. Then I went below, and finding my patient in his accustomed heavy and miserable condition, I returned his belongings to him, experiencing no difficulty in fastening the piece of jewellery about his neck by means of its cord of plaited hair.

To Corkran I said nothing more at that time. I could see he was anxious about my state of health, and I wished, first of all, to allay his fears before I put to him this question :

"Where did I get a knowledge of such words as *Inguas* and *Bossiemsans*, and what is their meaning ?"

He had never mentioned them : of that I felt sure. If they had a meaning, if they were Dutch or native words used at the Cape, then I would know with absolute certainty that this episode, which for a space made me forget our misery, was not merely a figment of the imagination.

As I have said, the breeze struck us, and with it came refreshing showers, which dashed joyously aboard us, and damped the splitting planks and hardened the melting pitch. It grew fresh and cool, and my vitality triumphed over my complaint. This was in part due to the finding of half a sack of those vegetables from the Americas called in the Indian tongue potatoes, which have a remarkable effect upon the scurvy poison. Corkran discovered them, and no doubt they had been shipped as a private store by Benjy Scudamore, who was a *bon-vivant*, and loved to tickle his palate with strange dishes. The Virginian doted on them, but I confess I found them insipid, save when salted ; yet they worked a partial cure, and that right speedily. Even Jacob, our worst case, benefited. And here let me say something to Corkran's credit. Though he delighted in these tubers, yet he forswore his share, even giving our blacks a portion.

"Mere worldly wisdom," you say ; "a better chance thereby of gaining port."

Mayhap, my friends ; but, believe me, it was not altogether this which made our tough old skipper refrain from this welcome dainty, at the sight of which his eyes sparkled like the bauble in his beard.

We recovered in some measure, and so did our Dutchman—for Dutchman he was. Further, the knife was his, and bore his initials. His name, he told us (for he spoke excellent English), was Jan Van Wyk. This, however, was all ; he was strangely reticent. Neither Jacob nor I could get a word out of him. Such a taciturn mortal I had never encountered. He gained strength, and he gained flesh. The promise he had given of being enormous when in his accustomed health was amply fulfilled. Like Jacob's, his bed was on the floor of our old cabin, we having shifted to Barney's, a larger and better-fitted room ; but once he began to mend, he was quickly on deck.

Let it not be thought he was ungrateful. On his first regaining consciousness he had thanked us gravely and courteously, stroking his long beard the while, and gazing fixedly at us with shrewd, grey eyes. Having said his say, he relapsed into silence ; and presently there was borne in upon me the fact that there was something uncanny about him, a look on his face and in his eyes which chilled one, a strange intentness about his gaze, a something lurking in his orbs to which I can give no name, but which most undoubtedly made itself felt. He smiled once, so that I perceived that he had fine, regular, white teeth, and yet I shuddered, for no earthly reason that I could see. I began to loathe our harmless passenger, and knew not the cause of my aversion till one day when he was well enough to sit at our table, and Corkran, for the first time, got a fair view of him in a good light.

We ate and drank, and scarcely spoke at all ; but when the man left us, helped on deck by Jacob—and a mighty pair they made—Corkran gulped down the brandy in his glass, and looked queerly at me.

"What think you of him?" he asked.

"He repels me," I answered ; "and yet I know not why it should be so."

"Shall I tell you?" asked the skipper.

I nodded, and held my breath a moment.

"The man is a Dutchman, as I supposed," said Corkran, "and I have no great love for that nation; but this fellow—poor devil that he is—has not so long since——" He paused.

"What!" I cried.

"You remember what you scratched on the boat's bottom?" was all the answer.

I remembered and understood, but as I glanced at the thin, scored face opposite me, I recalled something else. I recollected the night Corkran had come whining to my door, and the weirdness of his famished countenance. Horrible as the suspicion was, I could not put away from me the idea that then, ay, and now, there was faint, but indistinct, as though blurred by time and wiped out in part by weather, something in the visage of Corkran the Coxswain which had its counterpart in the face of the Dutchman, Jan Van Wyk.

Mark you, I am telling a true tale honestly. I desire to paint my comrades as they were, not as they should have been, and therefore I have not scrupled to record this incident. It was but a suspicion, remember, nor did it ever become anything more. Had it done so, I doubt if I could have continued to consort with the man from the Americas.

I put the idea therefore resolutely away from me, banished it from the chambers of my brain; though, after all, who is to blame a poor human being even if in the direst of extremities he outrages our conceptions and shocks our susceptibilities?

For the Dutchman I felt pity, mingled with horror and repulsion; but my feelings did me no credit. God knows I had never been forced to such straits as he had been if Corkran's surmise was a true one.

Neither of us spoke for full five minutes, though the captain gave a little hoarse chuckle in his throat. The silence became irksome, and I changed the tenor of our talk.

"You believe I have recovered?" I queried.

"Right as a trivet, thanks to old Nick."

I laughed at his assurance.

"Let me tell you," said I, "there was never anything the matter with me here," and I tapped my forehead.

"Ay, ay, nian, and is that so?" he answered drily.

"It is," I replied; "listen, my friend. Knowing you thought me a trifle cracked, I have kept to myself certain proofs that such was not the case, and have shared them with no one. Now tell me, is there in use at the Cape such a word as Bossiemans, which, from what I know of Dutch, I take to mean Bushmen."

He started visibly, and craned his head towards me.

"Stap my vitals!" he said; "but that is queer, my lad. These Bushmen, be the Abatwa, the Maligryghas of whom I spoke in your cottage. The term Bossiemans is a new one, but I have heard it. Surely I must have called them so some time or other?"

"Nay, the word has never passed your lips. I read it on the piece of paper that hangs at the Dutchman's neck."

"On the paper, but where—where?"

"To the north of Terra de Natal."

Corkran sprang out of his seat.

"Why!" he cried, "that is their country. In the great mountain chain are their painted caves and their poison pots."

"Precisely. Again, do you know the expression Inquas?"

"Inquas!" he repeated. "No, there you have me."

"Still, it is not a word one would coin. That also I saw on the chart well-nigh at its centre, and far from the sea."

"Namaqua I know," he answered; "but their country borders the ocean on the west, and they are Khoi-Khoins or Hottentots."

I remembered he had used the first of these terms before, and reminded him of the fact.

"True," said he, "'tis the dirty devils' name for themselves, and means men of men. I allow they are men of women, as we all are, but they are mighty poor specimens at that. No, no, my cock; 'tis the men of the mines we must seek, the workers in precious metal; but split me for a fool! here is mine own chart, which I had clean forgot, so put your finger on the places where these words were writ."

He produced the paper from his beard trinket, and I showed him the spot.

"Look," said I, "there is Cortada and Terra Alta just as on the other map; and between them was written in Dutch, 'Here is the golden city of O.S.'"

Corkran had seated himself again ere this, but once more he leaped from his seat, and this time he gripped my arm.

"Of O.S.?" he cried—"of O.S.?"

"Why, yes; I am at a loss to know what it means."

"It means," said he, speaking in a vague, uncertain fashion, "that there is indeed a God," and having so said, he grew moody and silent, and when I would have questioned him snapped at me viciously like an irritable dog.

"O.S.!" he muttered to himself, rising and striding to and fro on his bowed legs; "O.S. it must be, and yet the thing is scarce credible; but I will put it to the test—to the test. He may have come by it in some manner fair or foul. O.S., and a red line drawn through the river Camissa!"

Presently he drew himself together with an effort, and ceased his audible reflections.

"Doctor Harry," he said gravely, "I was a fool to doubt you. Still, I fancy no harm is done. You have said nothing of this to the Dutchman—he does not know we have the secret?"

"I have kept my mouth close shut," I replied, "and have not even told Jacob. To be sure, however, I clapped the paper into water to see if that would bring out the writing a second time, and Van Wyk may suspect us."

"Tut, tut, but that is bad. Still, it might have been wetted in the boat. How the devil is he to know?" cried Corkran fiercely. "Mark you, not a word of our intentions; he must never learn our designs, and I will find out whether or not he was bound for the Cape. If so, well and good; if not, then we are the greatest fools in Christendom, or have hold of the end of a very tangled skein."

"And with regard to O.S.?" I asked.

"D—— O.S.!" he shouted in a hoarse whisper, for such a thing is possible, though the statement seems absurd; "d—— O.S.! that's my affair, and I will answer for't in my proper time."

"Very good," I rejoined stiffly; "I have no wish to pry into

your secrets or endure your lack of civility ;" and thus I left him, and as I left he laughed, but his laugh was a hollow mockery of merriment.

The plot was thickening ; there was more in it than I had supposed. At the very beginning, away back in Bishop-Solingford, Nicholas Corkran had told me that the red and wavy line was writ in some one's blood, and for some definite reason, which he had kept to himself. What tragedy had we here? The matter was too intricate for me, and I had perforce to wait. "Why not compel Corkran to tell?" you ask. "Surely you and Jacob Little were more than a match for him, and three men on such a quest should have had all things made plain?" I grant you it had been better, but a quarrel would have ruined all, and, besides this, Corkran was a very difficult man to tackle. I have described him in vain if it is not apparent that he was an ugly customer. I put it to you, would you have tried to coerce such a gentleman of the high seas, especially when your future depended on him? I trow not. We had withstood him once over the matter of the slaves, and the result had not been encouraging: Benbow and a negro dead, the scurvy for a bedfellow, and a mysterious Dutchman for a passenger. No; I was resolved to leave Captain Nicholas alone for the future, and let him shape our course as long as we sailed in company. But for a dogged desire to see the venture to an end, I had backed out of it whenever we reached land. Howbeit it was so arranged that we should reach land in a peculiar fashion, and that I was to be yet further influenced—ay, and strengthened—in my desire to explore the unknown and gather treasure.

I went on deck, and found Jacob alone. Jan Van Wyk had gone below, being, as he said, fatigued. I only trusted he had not overheard our converse. I warned Jacob against the man, but to my dismay found that our good-natured giant had told this other giant the very things we desired to conceal from him. Thinking in his simplicity that confidence would beget confidence, the smith had allowed himself to be sucked dry by the wily Dutchman, who had expressed the deepest interest in the smith's tale of his encounter with the huge ape, and had been deeply

impressed by a sight of the monster's shaggy, leather-like hide. Jacob had also hoped, so he told me, to gather information about the country, for Van Wyk had admitted that he had visited the Cape. It was the latter who had done the garnering.

The smith was very contrite, though, as I could not enlighten him to any extent, he failed to see the reasons for our distrust. He assured me the Dutchman was a very pleasant fellow, though he spoke little, and he told me that he had concluded a bargain with him as to a wrestle between them when both had fully regained health and strength.

"Do you know, doctor," he said, "I believe I have found what I sought. He grows bigger every day, and has a fist that would fell an ox."

At any other time I would have been hugely tickled by this arrangement between Samson and Hercules, but at present it seemed to me that it was to be a wrestle with wits, and not with thews and sinews. Three to one—surely the odds were in our favour! I could not tell, for after all I had nothing to go upon—I was groping in the dark; and even Corkran, who knew more than I did, was not better informed regarding Van Wyk's present history, even if he were acquainted with his past. We could not compel the man to tell us, and he had a quiet way of evading our hints and questions. At times I was forced to the belief that he had forgotten recent events, that some shock had shaken his memory and left a gap in it. Certainly, he would often look vague and uncertain, and shake his head dolefully the while he stroked his beard.

Thanks to Jacob, the Dutchman, if he were, indeed, our rival, held the trump card for the nonce. There was no use grumbling and blaming the smith, and I deemed it wiser not to tell Corkran. He and Jacob were none too friendly as it was. Indeed, it was the latter's curious devotion to myself that had carried him thus far, ay, and was to carry him farther still, as I hope in time to show. All I did tell Captain Nicholas was that our passenger had been at the Cape, and this afforded the former the opportunity to test the latter.

"I hear," said he, the next day when we were all on deck, and

before we ran into the fog bank which wrought us such evil—"I hear that you know the Cape, Meinheer Van Wyk."

"Yes," said he quietly, "I have been there, kapitein."

"I wonder, now, did you ever meet a friend of mine in these parts, one Obed Schryner, who was in the service of the company?"

Had I not been watching the Dutchman's face intently I had missed the sudden shifting of his eyes, the fleeting glimpse of cunning and suspicion which crept into them for a moment.

"Obed Schryner!" he repeated thoughtfully. "Obed Schryner! Let me see. I have known Schryners—Otho there was, and Piet, and a woman called Marijtje; but Obed, niet!" and he stroked his beard complacently. "What was he like, this Obed?" he asked; but Corkran did not answer, for he had caught sight of a dark brown belt lying low down upon the sea, and was already on the *qui vive*.

"Het komt er niet op aan," muttered Jan Van Wyk to himself, and I, who had taken care to conceal my knowledge of Dutch, understood him to mean, "It is no matter." Perchance, however, it expressed more than was apparent.

The fog mattered, however, as we found to our cost. It was to be expected, for such sea mists are frequent in these latitudes, and we knew from Corkran's reckonings that we were not far from the southern extremity of Africa. We plunged into it softly, and it wrapped us round, dense, damp, salt, and stealthy. There was a breeze within it which merely made it the more confusing, for it swirled and eddied round us for two whole days in dark vapour masses, clearing but to gather again, drifting dismally over the ocean like a dirty smoke, rain-laden, soaking, chill, and altogether vile.

We beat our bell and kept our log astern, so that we knew our daily run, but we had no conception of our bearings. The sun's face was hidden, and never an observation could be taken. The negroes chattered at the chilliness, and we became again depressed. The nights brought us no relief. No friendly stars twinkled for us; there was no moon. Cling, clong! echoed the ship's bell, and, though we knew it not, it sounded the doom of the *Kittiwake*.

All the time the Dutchman kept to his cabin, eating what we sent him, but complaining bitterly of the cold, which, he declared, searched to the very marrow of his bones. If so, it had not far to penetrate, for he was still gaunt and ill-nourished.

To my mind his seclusion was suspicious, but we had all enough to do without troubling our heads about him. Corkran was on tenter-hooks, worried about the vessel, short in the temper, and would not discuss Jan Van Wyk with me at all. Jacob's scurvy grew worse, and he suffered from fits of shivering; while even my gums, that I had regarded as healed, showed signs of a tendency to bleed.

Captain Nicholas was too old a salt not to take every precaution against disaster. He had the boat provisioned, and even stowed away some money in her locker, for, as he said:

"'Tis better there out of harm's way than a means of dragging one down to the locker of friend Davy Jones."

His words were not inspiring, though he chuckled as he spoke.

These were miserable days—a silent sea, a silent fog, a silent ship, and a silent company, but everything must have an end. The great stretch of ocean mist terminated its sway by being torn to shreds by a fierce succession of squalls early on the morning of the third day. It was pitch dark, but one could see the white caps as they surged up as from a deep abyss; one could feel the fury of the gusts, and one could note how the ship heeled and hissed as she drove before them, and hearken to her canvas rending and lashing about the yards in streamers of brine-soaked cloth.

We were under little sail, for we could not manage any great spread, and, besides, Corkran was cautious. Still, we had at first too much, and our scuppers were awash ere the wind itself saved us by tearing and ripping aloft, blowing canvas clean out of the bolt-ropes or rending it like paper. The vessel righted, and, standing helplessly on deck, we let her drive, whither we knew not. The compass said south, but that scarce aided us. Corkran and Corrobee together hung on the tiller, and kept the waves from breaching us. The turmoil was terrible, the chaos appalling. What recollections I have of those few hours consist of a

sensation of utter blackness, a hissing roar, whip-like cracks, a stinging of salt upon the face, a rush of wind in the ears, a drunken, swinging toss this way and that, a cracking of spars, a thunder of breaking seas, a dozen sousing splutters, a tense strain upon the nerves, a fearful anxiety, and then—then, I say, a loud and prolonged booming like the noise of cannon.

"Breakers!" yelled a voice, and there came a wild cry from the negro, who was posted as a look-out in the bows.

I seemed to catch a glimpse of something white and leaping far out into the night, and then I saw Corkran bend forward and the black strain backwards in a desperate effort.

The ship seemed to pause in her rush, quivered, hung in the wind, and then hurled anyhow, broadside on, stern first, with masts severing like pipe-stems, with the sound of rending and of splintering, with a sensation as of rolling over and over, and with a belief that the world was at an end for us, I found we were in a tumult of mighty waters and amongst a wilderness of rocks. Shock after shock shook us; solid water walls crashed aboard; we were in a froth such as caps a jug of foaming ale.

Blinded, buffeted, choking, struggling fiercely, clinging to I knew what not, I was borne, as it seemed, through the air. Lights danced before my eyes, there was a drumming in my head, a sharp taste in my mouth. My heels shot upwards, my head sank downwards, my body was bent into a hoop. Suddenly I straightened out and clutched at something slimy. It was sea tangle. Dizzy, sick, and dazed, I clung to it and began to crawl. I crawled and better crawled, on and on, gasping and drowned by billow after billow. Then, at last, I knew no more, and was wakened by a glow upon my face. It was the sun's glare, hot and strong. My back rested on something firm and solid, for which I thanked God, and from which I concluded, though very slowly, that I had at last made the land.

CHAPTER XIX

WHAT BEFELL ON ROBBER ISLAND

WHEN first my eyes opened I did not comprehend what had happened. I imagined that my old mare Nancy had thrown me and that I was on the broad of my back on one of our old fen roads. Then, as my senses returned, I felt the heat on my face and knew that such a sun never poured his rays on pollard oaks or homely English hamlet. I was thousands of leagues away, that I remembered, but where, where?

Gradually events pieced themselves together in my dull brain, a series of pictures passing before my eyes and crowding together to form a little history of the past. The Dutchman first, Corkran, the smith, our two surviving blacks, the fog, the squalls, the dire catastrophe, and then myself, crawling, bleeding, blinded, the sport of cruel sea rollers.

Was I in a palsy, were my bones broken, was I dying? Such were my hasty questions to myself. I turned carefully on my side. To be sure I was bruised and sore, with a raw gash across the back of my left hand and a lump on my forehead, but beyond these minor injuries I felt sound and whole in body. I examined myself all over, sitting up to do so, but detected no broken bones or torn ligament. My clothes were already half dried and clung closely to me, being, like my hair, sticky by reason of the sea-salt.

With an effort I got upon my legs which shook violently under me, and my stomach promptly rebelled, while my head swam. I was fain to seek the sand again, but the sickness did

me good. No doubt I had swallowed some half gallon of strong brine, a very efficient emetic even in the case of a starving man.

Our two surviving blacks. The phrase kept repeating itself in my mind till the irony of it struck me. Surviving, forsooth! It was a miracle that I yet lived. Was it likely that any other had been spared? Heavens above! was I indeed the sole relic of the ship's company? Corkran had thrice been in such a position. Was he now numbered with the dead? Had the sea claimed Jacob Little? Had Meinbeer Jan Van Wyk escaped one peril to succumb to another? Had the *Kittiwake* proved the tomb of the two negroes? These were vain thoughts. It behoved me to be up and doing, to gauge the full extent of the calamity, and with this object in view I again bestirred myself. I was fain, however, to keep to my hands and knees and crawl thereon by reason of the dizziness of my head.

In sleepy Bishop-Solingford I had hankered after change and excitement. Of a verity both had been doled out to me in no scanty measure. I tried to obtain some idea of the land on which I had been cast. In front stretched the limitless ocean, barren of sail or rock or any kind of life, save a few gulls flapping slowly, and now and then screaming harshly or poisoning and diving intent on prey. I was on a beach of fine sand which ended in tangle-covered rocks at the sea-margin and behind me ran to where the ground sloped upwards and was coated with grass and sown with great stones. The elevation was considerable, the stretch extensive, but it barred my view. I could see no sign of human habitation. The place looked exceeding desolate. Like some animal I painfully dragged my way along the beach, and at times uttered a cry, kneeling and hulloaing with my hands to my mouth. The gulls, raucous-voiced and unconcerned, answered me. A heavy swell, born of the night's wild turmoil, thundered in turbulent foaming masses on the iron shore, beating monotonously and helplessly on the grim and forbidding foreground. There was a sadness over all, a moan from the sea, a melancholy in the cry of the birds, a loneliness which gripped me. Still, the sun was bright, the

waves glittered ere they broke and sparkled after bursting, the air was keen and fresh, the glassy slope refreshed the eye, the very feel of the firm sand was comforting. I looked for signs of the *Kittiwake*. There was no hulk, no skeleton of timber ribs, nothing with coherency, but as I gained the reefs I found evidence in plenty of the hapless ship and the power and violence of the sea. Planks, shattered spars, a portion of a mast, a fragment of the bowsprit warped about with cordage, a hen-coop which in Benjy's time had harboured occupants, a hatch cracked across, a stout piece of bulkhead, raw and frayed, the yellow grain of it torn and gored by the cruel black fangs which had pierced the barque's bottom and had held her for the billows to wreak their spite upon her. I saw all these things and then I saw a man's head. For a moment I thought that the round black thing cropping up above a rock shaggy with the seawrack was the head of some seal basking on the shore, but presently, drawing a little nearer to it, I perceived it was the back of a human skull, the frizzed poll of a negro. I shouted, and the head turned and looked at me. Then indeed there could no longer be any doubt. A line of white showed in the face, a hand and lean arm shot upwards in welcome, and Corrobee, for it was no other, answered my cry. Still he did not stir. I was surprised he did not come scrambling towards me with all the eager excitement of his race. As it was I made for him as rapidly as I could, and at last reached the huge boulder which hid the rest of his body.

To this day I remember that clamber chiefly by the smell which filled my nostrils, the strong odour of damp wrack, the scent of shell-fish, of salt water turning warm in the sun, of green ribands of weeds, spreading like slime over the surfaces of pools or bunched half-dry and sand-crusts in the yellow spaces betwixt the stones and pebbles.

There is no keener sense than that of smell, no greater aid to memory, and yet we scarcely recognise its power. It seems to me as though I recall well-nigh every place in which I have sojourned by its effect upon those nerves we term the olfactory. This is no learned treatise, however, but an honest tale of travel

and of peril, so let me recount what I found when I reached the negro.

I discovered why he had not stirred. One of his ankles was bruised and swollen, having been severely wrenched; while one leg was fast wedged between the rock and the side of that very boat in which the Dutchman had drifted to the *Kittiwake*. Nor was this all. In the bottom of the little craft, lying beneath the thwarts, half-in, half-out of a dirty mess of sand and powdered shells and salt water was the body of my good friend, Jacob Little. He was on his back, his face pale, his eyes closed, a great cut seaming his temple, his white hair matted with blood which had dried into a black crust, but even thus one hand firmly clenched the haft of his sledge hammer from which even death itself had not been able to part him.

At the sight I uttered an exclamation of grief and dismay, but Corrobee shook his head, and chiefly by signs gave me to understand that the smith still lived. My first care was to satisfy myself that this was the case, and to my joy I found that Jacob had not yet slipped his cable, as Corkran would have said. He was in a swoon, partly by reason of the blow on his skull and partly, no doubt, from loss of blood. A man stricken by scurvy, as I have shown, is at all times liable to bleed, and after the buffetings he had experienced Jacob was a mass of bruises and extravasations. The gash had also bled freely, and the man, for all his strength, was weak and helpless as a babe. Here was a pretty dilemma. The boat rested on a thick bed of weed in a narrow gap amongst fringed boulders, and was well below the full-tide mark. The hungry sea was creeping shorewards, swallowing up more and more of the beach with each successive roller, the negro was imprisoned, the smith unconscious, and myself so miserable a wreck that I could do nothing to aid either of them. I tried and failed. At first it seemed easy. I tore away the wrack from the boulder, hoping to free Corrobee's limb, but soon discovered that his leg was not merely jammed between it and the boat's gunwale; his foot was wedged into a cranny in the rock away beneath the boat's bilge at a place where I could not reach it. Further, the least

What Befell on Robben Island 221

exertion sickened me till I was fain to desist. But the incoming tide would not desist from its ceaseless advance. Nearer and nearer it crept, like some stealthy beast of prey. The sight of it made me desperate. I wrought in an agony, but to no avail. The full horror and irony of the situation swept in upon me. Here were these two, the one a friend and comrade, the other a very faithful servant, saved in some miraculous manner from the perils of shipwreck and of tempest, and were they now to be the victims of the hungry maw of the sea, calm and relentless, of the common everyday tide from which a child could have run and which to me was harmless? I fell upon my knees and prayed. Heaven knows what words I uttered. The sun had stood still at the bidding of Joshua. Was not the sea in the hollow of the Lord's hand? I prayed, and then fixed my eyes on the snowy line of surf. Inch by inch, foot by foot, it advanced. The black and glistening summits of rocks vanished, bright sand stretches disappeared. With each boom and splash the froth and spume surged and slithered closer to us. I stared at these eager, white, out-stretched tongues of broken water as though fascinated, and found myself gabbling, "Great God! great God!" after the manner of an idiot.

All this time it had never occurred to me to try to drag Jacob farther up the beach. Such folly is scarce credible, but it is the truth. I stooped and grasped him beneath the armpits; I endeavoured to lift him towards the bows. I might have succeeded had there been nothing to do but pull him onwards and haul him over the boat's gunwale, for in my anxiety and distress I forgot my sickness, and fear put strength into me. But this was not all, my task was none so simple. Jacob Little was no ordinary man, and he filled the boat's bottom, so that when I began to drag upon him I found that he also was a prisoner pinned fast between the planking and one of the thwarts. The cross seat had been broken and driven downwards, so that one end of it was fixed firmly against the side of the boat and pressed upon the man's body. The negro bent and strove to help me, but he could not reach the place, even though he strained till the exquisite pain

which he endured forced a groan from him. I tugged fiercely at the piece of wood in vain. I had no knife, no saw, no hatchet. Then I remembered the hammer. With difficulty I freed it from Jacob's grasp, and stood up, dripping with sweat, panting with exertion. But when I attempted to wield it I found I was unequal to the effort. My blows on the edge of the thwart were as feeble as the tappings of a woodpecker. It was useless, and I knew it. Again I prayed, but even as my brain strung unvoiced words together I called to mind the old story of King Canute and his courtiers. Was it likely, I asked myself, that the course of nature would be altered at my petition? What were the lives of two men and one a negro to the inexorable progress of Nature's workings? I perceived we were puppets, the sport of time and circumstance, and I ceased praying, and, like a blasphemous fool, I cursed my Maker.

Corrobee, meanwhile, had begun to struggle violently. I expected every moment to hear the bones of his leg snap asunder, but even were they to fracture that would not aid us. He might, indeed, be able to stoop sufficiently, but no man with a broken leg, with bone-ends jarring one against the other, or thrusting through the skin, could hope to exercise his strength. Pain may not wholly master, but it must ever cripple to some extent. Another thought struck me, and I used the hammer handle as a lever, but with no better success. I could neither free Corrobee nor Jacob by such means. Then, realising that I was indeed foiled, that these two must perish miserably, I think I went mad.

I stood and raved again, and shook my fist at the mocking sea; I resolved to drown along with them. The negro abandoned his efforts, and grew sullen and silent. I was surprised at his fortitude. He neither whimpered nor wept, but stared fixedly at the lapping line of froth and bubbles. A gull screamed, and, with open beak, seemed to chuckle harshly. I cursed it, but suddenly as the danger grew nearer, a selfish thought crept into my mind. Why should I trouble? I was safe, I could mock the breakers as the gull mocked the imprisoned men. The smith would never know, he would be choked in his sleep, slip silently from a cruel world, and as for Corrobee, he was a black heathen,

What Befell on Robben Island 223

who could have but little interest in life, being without learning or ambition.

Yes, I confess such were my evil imaginings; but a feeling of revulsion came upon me, I called myself coward, and traitor, and callous brute, and then, as a last chance, I resolved to seek help.

Explaining my purpose to the negro, for I could not have him think that I deserted them, I scrambled as hastily as possible to the firm sand in which the rocks ended. Which way was I to turn? The direction I took might mean everything. On one side was a long stretch, curving at last as the land turned at an angle to itself; on the other, a ridge of rock, a miniature cliff, shut out my view, for it stretched right from the sea to the pasture-land. Behind, as I have said, rose a slope, rock-sown, grass-covered, and desolate.

I resolved to turn to the left, and straightway made for the cliff. Excitement conquered sickness, but my head throbbed, and in parts where the sand was powdery and soft my legs wobbled at the knees like those of an old grandfather. Still on I ran, gulping at the throat, breathing heavily, but buoyed up by a slender hope. There might be fellow-men on the other side of the ridge of bluish rock. The gull flew in a line parallel with me, and cried raucously at intervals. It was like a persistent evil spirit.

At last I reached the place, and leaned heavily for a moment against the hot stone, though my eyes sought some spot where I could mount to the summit of this boundary. I looked, and saw none. The surface of the rock wall was singularly smooth. Was it possible that I would have to traverse its whole length, and go round it where it sprang from the face of the hill. "No, no," I cried to myself; "surely not, surely not!" and I flung myself at its face and strove to ascend as some stricken fly strives to crawl up a window pane. Like the insect, I could gain no firm hold, and fell downwards on my back. The minutes were speeding, the sea was winning this race. It was useless to think of passing the ocean end of the barrier, for against it the waves were beating and bursting. The gull flapped beyond it, and out of sight, screaming harshly and repeatedly, as though in merriment, as though it enjoyed its triumph and my discomfiture.

Cursing, I set my face towards the land, and began to run along the side of the low cliff, and as I ran, cursing, I was answered by the curses of a man upon its farther side. For a moment I believed my ears deceived me, that at the most I heard an echo of my own breathless utterances. I stopped and listened, but was speedily assured. I was master of no such vocabulary. There could be no doubt that the words proceeded from some other throat than mine, and, what is more, there could be no doubt of the man, or, at least, of his voice. It was that of Corkran the Coxswain. Upon occasion, as I have said, his language could be remarkable, and this occasion, I perceived, must be indeed something very especial. There was no break in his sentences. They poured forth in a continuous stream. The strangest gabble of the oaths of all countries was being spat forth with a vehemence and viciousness alike peculiar and refreshing. To tell the truth, I felt grateful. They expressed my own feelings in a way utterly beyond me. This was my first thought, but it passed at once, and I resolved, when I had opportunity, to take myself to task for permitting myself to harbour such an idea at such a moment. Were not my prayers answered? Had I not been guided aright? Should I not rather be full of wonder and thankfulness? No doubt, only there was not time for these considerations.

"Corkran!" I shouted; "Corkran!"

The wrathful babbling ceased.

"Ahoy!" came the hail. "Split me! an' I do not hear Doctor Harry!"

"Yes, yes," I cried. "But make haste and come over to this side. It is a matter of life and death."

"Ecod!" said he. "I thought the former had no longer any interest for you and the rest. How comes it you got ashore?"

The last sentence came from above. I stepped back, and there was the old sea-dog on the top of the rock wall. He was a strange sight. A red neckerchief passed over his wig, and was fastened beneath his chin; his hair was all bunched together and sprinkled over with sand, and at least half his beard was gone, and with it the bauble.

His chin was raw, the knot fastening the kerchief was wet, his

What Befell on Robben Island 225

shirt, for he had no coat, was stained with blood. Otherwise, he did not appear to have suffered, for he displayed considerable agility in swinging himself downwards. Fearful we would be too late, and in my haste scarce recognising the importance of what had happened to him, I did not wait, but plodded off across the sand, waving a hand behind me by way of summons. He was speedily at my side, but, perceiving I was in dire distress, did not utter a word.

I noticed he was bare-footed, but otherwise remain unconscious of that run, of that contest with the tide.

We were in time, but only just in time. Already the negro's face was damp with spray, already the sea was bubbling through the weed bunches on which lay the boat. A few yards away the curving water-walls were rounding their smooth, streaked backs, and their foaming crests were plunging downwards and dashing themselves into a mere broken jabble, which surged onwards, and capped the pools with a creamy froth, or went hissing backwards, foiled for the nonce.

I was past speaking when I reached the place, but there was no need for speech. Captain Nicholas took in the whole situation at a glance, but evinced precious little concern for the lives at stake.

"Heaven send the boat is sound," said he, and I verily believe his chief object in freeing Jacob Little was to get a sight of the craft's under-planking, and see what damage she had sustained. He speedily, however, made me realise what a fool I had been. No thought of the locker in the stern sheets had occurred to me. The first thing Corkran did was to force it open. Within were the very tools required, stored there in part by himself and in part by those concerning whom Jan Van Wyk, had he chosen, could no doubt have told a tale.

"Y'are a fine surgeon, Doctor Harry," said Corkran to me, as he set to work upon the thwart; and I could do nothing but sit disconsolately like a shamefaced boy taken to task for want of common sense.

He was not long in sawing the wood asunder, and then, having got back my breath, I was able to help him. Together we carried

the smith a little farther up the shore, and then returned, Corkran intent on saving the boat, while my thoughts were rather with the negro.

I had several lessons that morning which I laid to heart. Apart from the matter of the locker, I noted that Corkran was careful to assure himself as to the trend of the shore. He was too cunning a water-dog to let himself be cut off by the tide. Fortunately there was no risk in that direction, and we stood by the boat. She had two planks stove in, but Corkran did not despair of securing her. As the sea swept in about us we managed to slew her round, and so to get at the cranny in which the black's foot was fast.

At first it seemed to me that in order to save his life I would have to put the carpenter's tools to a new use. Already the water was halfway to his knees, and it was only by feeling with our hands that we were able to realise poor Corrobee's plight. His foot was twisted and gripped firmly at the ankle bones, and he must have suffered intense agony. The accident was most peculiar, but it appears to me that it is the peculiar that happens in foreign parts. I was past surprise, and took all things as a matter of course. Such adventurings as I have undergone constitute, I take it, the proper training for would-be philosophers. They are of more value than all the teachings of sects and creeds. Certainly my good wife affirms that I am very placid in temper, and do not worry over trifles, as is the way with most men.

My apprenticeship, therefore, has done me good ; but I am free to confess it was of the roughest, and one I scarcely recommend to all and sundry. I fancy that if many young sparks were to emulate me, but few of them would ever live to be husbands, and be held up by their spouses as patterns and models. It is not given to every one to have the nine lives of a cat.

Fortunately I had not to proceed to extremities in the case of Corrobee, for, by prising at the rock with pieces of wood and working very gently, we succeeded in releasing him, though at some expense of skin, and not till we were again soaked through and through. As there must have been room for the foot to enter the cranny, it is reasonable to suppose that the subsequent

swelling had been the cause of its fixation. However that may be, the negro, like Mephibosheth in Holy Writ, was impotent in both feet, and, like Jacob, he had to be conveyed to dry land.

Eventually we got them placed side by side on the warm sand well above high-tide mark, and then we did our best to save the craft which had been their salvation and was like to have been the tomb of one of them at least.

The beach shoaled rather speedily, and thus we found a fair depth of broken water in advance of those crashing billows, which would soon have broken the boat to splinters. Corkran was a wonder. He fairly revelled in these salvage operations. His energy and resource were alike remarkable—ay, and the strength with which he withstood the eager rush of the tide and its strong sucking backdraw. I laboured up to my waist, while he was submerged well-nigh to his shoulders. The boat was light, and the sea itself aided us. Splashing, tripping, spitting, gasping, winking the brine out of our eyes, bruised, cut, and half-drowned, we yet succeeded in at last dragging and floating our craft over the rocks and reefs to the sand belt. For a whole hour we wrestled in the water, but finally we had her safe from the line of violent surf, and could afford to rest. Excitement had buoyed me up, but as soon as there was no more to be done I tottered to where Corrobee sat dismally and Jacob lay unconscious, and, flinging myself down—wet, weak, hungry, and ill—I slept the sleep of utter exhaustion.

When next I wakened I found that many hours had sped. The eventful day had gone, and following it the night in which it had ended.

It was the morning of another day, the sun once more hot and high, the sand warm, the sea a great level stretch, with scarce a movement of its bosom save where a lazy heave struck the shelving shore. Further, I found that I was stark naked and up to my neck in sand, that I was as hungry as Jack shark—ay, and so thirsty that I felt as though I could have drained the ocean itself, provided it had been fresh.

The little sand-lice leaping on my face had brought me to my senses, and I quickly perceived, after I had struggled into a sitting

posture, that other changes had taken place. Like me, Jacob was buried to his neck; Corrobee's ankles were bound about with bandages; a fire of sticks and driftwood was smoking a little way off, and before it squatted Corkran, busy cooking some kind of meat. He had removed the neckerchief which bound his wig, and looked more like himself.

As soon as he perceived that I had returned to life he hailed me cheerily.

"Away with you for a brine bath!" he shouted. "There lie your clothes as dry as the sun can bake them. By the time you are dressed I warrant I will have something to set your mouth a-watering."

"Water is what I need," I answered huskily, thrusting out my stiff and parched tongue.

"And that's a want easily supplied," quoth Nicholas, and presently brought me a wooden vessel—a calabash, as he called it—filled with the most grateful of drinks, the aqua fontana of the ancients. I learned he had obtained it from a spring at some distance, and I gulped it down, washed out my mouth with it, damped my salt and crusted lips, and felt mightily revived. He helped me to my feet.

"Art strong enough for a bath, my lad?" he queried.

"Yes, yes," I was bold enough to declare, and managed to reach the rock, where I was content to sit in a pool, despite the smartings of some dozen half-healed cuts and scratches. Still more refreshed, I returned and got me into my shrunken garments.

I would not eat till I had examined Jacob Little. He was still senseless, but his eye winked a little at the finger touch, and he stirred uneasily when one pinched his skin. His head was bound up very skilfully, and satisfied that he had made progress towards recovery, I addressed myself to my first meal on land since we had quitted the country of the great apes.

It was some kind of rabbit that Corkran had been cooking, and its flesh seemed to me most succulent and savoury, though my portion was half raw and smoked on one side. As I ate I let old Nicholas talk, and soon discovered we were in no such evil case. It appeared we had been cast ashore on Robben

What Befell on Robben Island 229

Island, so named after the seals that frequent its shores, and which is situate some ten or more sea miles from the Cape itself at the very entrance of Table Bay.

Corkran knew the spot, and explained that we were on the ocean side of the island, hence my inability to see the mainland, which was plainly visible from farther round the coast and from the summit of the slope behind us. This was indeed heartening news, but Corkran was full of grumbles at the loss of the *Kittiwake*.

"Zounds!" said he, "to think o' the old *Bird o' Paradise* playing us such a trick! She should have known better, for many a time she's done the run from Madagascar to the west. 'Tis most cursed luck."

"We do wrong to repine," I answered. "Consider how we have been mercifully spared as by a miracle. Think of the Dutchman and the other negro!"

"The Dutchman," snarled Corkran; and, looking at him, I again noted the state of his beard and the absence of the bauble.

Indeed, his hand sought the raw patch on his chin, and I saw that the skin of his neck was torn open at the spot where the chain loop had pierced it. I had clean forgotten his loss, but now my interest was excited.

"Do you tell me," said I, "that Jan Van Wyk has anything to do with——"

I nodded towards him, there was no need to be more explicit.

"Anything!" he cried; "ay, ay, everything, the swine! let me but get within pistol range of his hide, and I'll teach him to rob a senseless man!"

"But are you certain he was to blame? Is it not conceivable that in the struggle ashore it was torn from you by a floating spar, a sharp point of rock, or——"

"Body o' me!" he cried, "y'are as full of hypotheses as I would I were of rum. Bethink you, now, Doctor Harry, can you imagine no way in which I proved the matter to my satisfaction. Observe, I was swept round yonder, and driven free of rocks far up on the sands by a merciful Providence, I will allow, who thereafter permitted a sneaking dog of a Dutchman to play the thief

on me. A pretty way it was to serve a man, to wrench half his beard away and tear his neck open. Had I not been as still as a log, to all intent stiff and cold, I vow he had not ventured to use me so roughly. Let it pass, let it pass, I will yet be even with him or I am never old Nick Corkran, but rack your brains, my worthy surgeon, and tell me how I found out on waking?"

"You saw the man himself," I hazarded.

"Devil a sign! my cock. I've chased all over this confounded isle, and not so much as seen his shirt-tails. There used to be folk here, a Hottentot woman and her people, and at times some of the burghers from the Cape after seals and penguins or to keep an eye on the sheep, or knock a few conies on the head; but though the huts are standing, for it was in one of them I got the calabash, there's not a soul to the fore."

"Then he left something behind him."

"Ecod, now! he left his mark on me; is that what you mean?"

"Nay, but some trifle or other, a kerchief, or——"

"A kerchief! for me to staunch my bleeding, I presume, or, mayhap, a bottle o' strong scents to aid my recovery, or a small keg o' Cognac to cheer my spirits. A pretty diagnosis, Doctor Harry; but come, I will show you, for the tide is out, and we can round the rock ridge."

I rose and followed him, a trifle annoyed at his crustiness and clumsy sarcasm, and so we walked in silence to the other side of the low cliff which had foiled me on the preceding day. Leaving the rocks and pools, we turned inland; and gained the sand. Presently, far up the beach, Corkran stopped, and pointed downwards with his finger.

In the entertaining history of one Robinson, written by Mr. Defoe, a handsome copy of which, with several woodcuts, has recently been sent me by the vicar as a Christmas gift, we read of the manner in which the castaway discovered that he was not alone upon the island of his exile. In the same way Corkran convinced me that the Dutchman, Jan Van Wyk, had not perished in the wreck, for, leading upwards towards the loose sand and the grassy ground were the huge footmarks of a huge, barefooted man.

CHAPTER XX

THE CHALLENGE

Now I do not propose to exhaust the patience of the reader, if such there be, with any lengthy description of our brief sojourn on Robben Island. I am all for action, for describing several surprising events which befell us in the immediate future, and, consequently, I will be brief.

Let me say, then, that I could not discover the reason of Corkran's wrath at the loss of his trinket. He heartily damned the Dutchman, and was much perturbed but, though I pressed him to give me his confidence, he would not open his lips on the subject.

"Look you," he said at length, "when we are come to Terra de Natal I will tell you the whole tale ; ay, as to Obed Schryner and the bloodmark on the paper, and the meaning of the bauble. I like you, my lad, and I trust you ; so you must even trust me, but if you do not, and continue to weary me with questions, then, hang me ! but we part company."

Being doubly interested in all this mystery, and more than ever intent upon the quest, I wisely held my tongue and accompanied him in an exploration of the island, which really meant a search for Jan Van Wyk. I recognised one benefit resulting from the theft, it went to prove that I had been right, and Corkran wrong. The Dutchman must have been on his way to the Cape, and not homeward bound, and the words uttered in his delirium had signified chagrin and despair at a purpose foiled. Corkran agreed with me on this point, and was somewhat comforted by the reflection.

We went on the quest armed with a handspike and a heavy spar, and perhaps it was as well we did not encounter the object of our search.

The place has been often and well described, suffice it, then, to say that from its rocky summit I viewed for the third time the mainland of Africa. But now it was on the southern extremity I gazed, on a great sweep of bluish shore-line, on low, bare stretches, on hill ranges, on a bold promontory to the south, and, above all, on that superb mountain, flat-topped, cloud-capped, massive, buttressed, and majestic, which guards the settlement of the Dutch, and forms a vast barrier to the northward. I was to learn to know it better, to explore its wooded kloofs, to reside within its shadow, to see it clear-cut, black and frowning in the sunshine, purple and mysterious under the moon's rays, wrapped in mists and vapours; but still I do not forget it as I first saw it, miles away across the sea, hazy of outline, its summit shrouded, its bold features softened by distance and the ocean light, but for all that the enormous sentinel of this vast southern land. I call to mind a tall ship making the Bay, the cry of sea-birds, the freshness of the salt air, and a great feeling of freedom and vigour somehow surged through me. The very immensity of the prospect, the thought that I gazed at an unknown continent, which reached unbroken for thousands of leagues into other climes and other latitudes, lifted me above the pettiness of my own immediate affairs. My ideas broadened, and I braced myself against the breeze and laughed, once more a stout, well-fed man, ready to grapple with the future.

At the very beginning we were baffled; we could find no trace of Jan Van Wyk. For the nonce I was unable to explain his disappearance. It might be, I argued, that he had found a boat and made for the coast, or that he was concealed in some of the fissures and crevices of the rocks on the western side of the isle. Though it is but a mile in length, it contains plenty of hiding-places, and our search could not be thorough. Certain it is that the Dutchman and his booty escaped us—a fact of more importance than I then perceived.

Corkran and I compared our experiences on the morning of

the disaster, and found them very similar, save that he had altogether escaped the rocks, and even the pebbly foreshore.

"By Daddy Neptune!" said he, "it seems to me I was born to be hanged, for I can no more drown than a cork! Faith! but I got a crack on the pate with a piece of timber which well-nigh stove me in. Did you not once say I was spared to be of use? It was true, my lad, and the same thing has again happened, for, otherwise, how could you have patched up the Dutchman's boat, as I am going to do?"

"Yes, or for that matter, freed the others?"

"Ho, ho!" he chuckled, for he was beginning to regain his wonted spirits. "There I had you on the hip; but do you search the beach for wreckage, the while I get these two planks put ship-shape. We will make the Cape in our own craft, and not bide here to be picked up like beggars."

It was typical of the man's independence. I have never met any one who equalled him in that particular, but he oft swore that it was a common trait in Virginia, where they bred men who were neither moles, book-worms, courtiers, sycophants, nor popinjays. Certainly if they breed many of his stamp, I am free to confess it must be a very turbulent colony, and like to cause England and the rest of the world considerable trouble one of these days.

Jacob so far recovered as to become conscious, but he remained dazed and much pained by the light in his eyes. The negro, however, mended apace, rubbing his ankles with the fat from the rabbit, and was able to help Corkran in his work.

My search was not crowned with much success. True, I found plenty of relics, but nothing of value, save a cask of wine and a small tub of salted junk, the which was scarce a prize considering we had mutton for the killing and conies in abundance. I am wrong, there was something else, for I have been merely considering stomach comforts, whereas I found one of the jib sails wrapped round the fragment of the bowsprit. This pleased Corkran most of all, for the oars had been washed out of the boat before she rode to shore on a wave crest, half swamped and with gunwales awash, and it would have been a weary business reaching

the mainland with such make-shifts of paddles as we were able to invent.

All day we laboured, and spent another night on the shore, rigging up the canvas as a shelter, for the dews were heavy. The following morning broke calm and clear, the sea merely rippling under the breath of a light breeze. With great difficulty we got the boat launched on the out-going tide at a place where there was a natural sandy channel twisting and turning amongst the rocks. Fortunately she was a light craft, and Corrobee, shuffling on his knees, was able to assist us in moving her by pushing vigorously.

Jacob had regained his wits, and his head was healing, the only marked symptom of his injury being an irritability of temper, all the more conspicuous from the fact that he was, as a rule, so placid and content.

The wine was spoiled and brackish, so we spilled it, and filled the cask at the spring. Then, getting the smith aboard, and stepping a small mast which Corkran had devised, and indeed he was most ingenious at such carpenter's work, we hoisted our rag of a sail, and, with a rude oar as a helm, fared forth into the deep. Having stored a sufficiency of heavy stones aboard by way of ballast, the little craft, when trimmed, sailed none so badly, and was tight as a corked bottle for the greater part of her journey. Thereafter she began to leak, but I used the calabash as a baling dish, and kept her comparatively free.

The island slowly receded, its features grew blurred and indistinct, and as the boat heeled and bubbled and cleft her way like a live thing, the Bay opened out before us, and behold ! there were three or four vessels lying at their anchorage. On we sped, and we perceived that two, at least, were Indiamen, low in the waist, prodigiously high in the poop, with bowsprits cocked to the heavens, and double tiers of guns. Their tall masts with clumsy tops shot up against the background formed by that vast rampart which I have but poorly described, and they sat squat and square on the calm sea like broad-sterned ducks upon a pond. Ships of the great Netherlands company, beyond a doubt, fresh from Europe, or touching at the Cape in the long home run from Java or Batavia or Calicut.

As we neared them Corkran made the negro take the steering oar, and then did a queer thing, but one wholly characteristic. He had a fixed idea that England, and not Holland, should be the greatest sea power. He acknowledged the Dutch were fine seamen, and compared them favourably with French, Spanish, and Portuguese, but for that very reason he was jealous of them, and swore by Blake and earlier mariners of the ocean isle. So now what does he do but whip out a flag he had contrived to fashion from his red neckerchief and the tails of his shirt. "Split me, Doctor Harry," said he, but we must hoist our colours, though we have no gun wherewith to salute them! Are these baggy breeches to think they are cocks of the sea walk? No, no, my lad, up she goes!"

With that he ran his precious bit of bunting up to the mast-head, a very fair red cross of St. George, which streamed out bravely and which he eyed lovingly with one optic shut, and his withered mahogany visage screwed up and full of pride and vain-glory. I was hugely tickled. Here were we flaunting this bravery, and yet a sorrier set of mortals it would have been hard to find. The old tarpaulin, his chin half raw, was in his shirt, with his sleeves rolled up, and he wore a pair of Benjy's fine-coloured tights, which were sadly stained and torn, while he was barefooted and bareheaded, his mop of a wig forming sufficient protection from the sun. Jacob, in his rough clothes, lay in the stern sheets, with his head bound up, and his face very pale and bloodless. The negro, lean and haggard, handled the oar, and his feet and legs were swathed about with dirty rags. I knew my clothes had shrunk till they were very far from fitting me, and I had a lump on my forehead that I fancied must be turning greenish-yellow in hue, while I had constructed a headpiece of wood and canvas, the which I kept damp, and which must have given me a most peculiar aspect. Verily, we were a villainous-looking company; but we were sun-browned, bearded, and, despite the scurvy, must have appeared a hardy set of voyagers. After all, there is nothing like a life in the open air for the filling out of chests, the hardening of muscles, the quickening of sight, ay, and for teaching readiness and resource. We were yet to have need of our training or ever

we gained the great swamp, or clapped eyes on the walls of the golden city.

Merrily we ran, and as we slipped past the Indiamen their crews gathered at the sides to gaze at us, and even gave us a cheer, a friendly greeting, both well-timed and heartsome.

"Ho, ho!" said Corkran, "this is none so bad. Our Jans and Piets seem to have forgot we are a few stray hairs of the dog that bit them."

"If I remember rightly the biting was not all on one side," I answered, "for it is well to be fair-minded, and pay due honour to a stout foe."

"You may say so," growled Corkran; "who else among seafolk ever furl'd the tops'ls o' war-ships in the Thames? Still, we served them their own sauce hot, my lad, and I, for one, bear them no grudge, though, Lord love you! they make a poor show of a colony."

I was soon to test the truth or otherwise of his statement, for already we could discern houses on shore nestling at the foot of the mountain, and make out a building larger than the others, which Nicholas told me was the castle of five bastions.

"Yonder," said he, "is what they call the lion's head, and there is Devil's peak, whence blow the most blustering of sou'-easters. Look at the gorges, the kloofs, in the mountain's flank. I mind when these were full of great trees, but they have thinned the forests with a vengeance. Ecod! but the place hath grown since I quitted it. I hear that many French and Walloons have settled with the Dutch. The French are Huguenots, and will make things hum, for they are a clever folk, and have not brains which move like canals."

He sat and stared at the prospect, which was indeed entrancing and magnificent.

"I wonder, now," he continued, "if they have killed off the sea-cows in the swamp, and if there is an elephant this side of the sandy neck? In my time the antelopes played the mischief with the gardens in the very town itself, coming in troops and droves in the night-time, and being bolder than the lions and the leopards which haunt the slopes."

He spoke calmly, as a matter of course, but I confess he set my blood a-dancing. To me all this was wonderful. The thought of seeing these wild animals, and perhaps having to do battle with them, filled me with the greatest interest in the place, and I was the first ashore when we had run into the mouth of the Fresh River and lowered our sail.

Now it is not my business to describe, like some historian or geographer, the features of the Cape, its inhabitants, both white and black, its town and castle, its reservoir and mill, the gardens of the governor, the Javanese horses and other domesticated animals, the wild beasts of the kloofs and savannahs, the fish which may be caught in its seas, its comforts and discomforts, and a multitude of other matters. Are there not for those who read the Dutch, the book published by Hondius of Amsterdam, the work of Neiuhof, the verses of Van Overbeke, the volume of Dapper, which he had never written but for Wreede, ay, and a host of others of good or ill repute? In the French we have Father Tachard's labours, which I confess I do not know, and in mine own tongue has not William Dampier made publicity of his voyages, and had them rendered into the Dutch? Further, from my old friend the vicar I but recently received a treatise from one Ogilby, John Ogilby, of London, which is puffed as being an accurate description of Africa. I account the man a hopeless liar, or else a gull, for, as I shall show, what he writes anent the Caffres is the veriest nonsense.

"The Cabonas," he says, "are a very black people"—this being in some measure true—"with hair that hangs down their backs to the ground"—a most villainous falsehood. "These are such inhuman cannibals that if they can get any men they broil them alive and eat them up."

Here, indeed, is a playful extravagance. "They have some cattle, and plant calabasses, with which they sustain themselves." Verily, they would grow lean on such fare; but hearken further:

"They have, by report of the Hottentots, rare portraitures, which they find in the mountains, and other rarities (*animum pictura pascit inani*), but by reason of their distance and barbarous qualities the whites have never had any converse with them."

Heard one ever the like? To be sure the book is old, at the best largely a copy of Dapper, yet no doubt Master Spetticue thought he had unearthed a treasure in Fleet Street, and so sent it me forthwith.

It is to correct such follies that I give my own adventurings to the world, which, though remarkable, are none the less faithfully recounted, and if considered critically and in a friendly spirit, will be found not only possible but probable by those who are acquainted with the perils of the sea and the strangeness of these distant regions. Let this digression, then, be pardoned, and let it suffice to say that we were most hospitably received, fed, lodged and tended by a very decent and plodding set of folk. To be sure, thanks to Corkran's forethought in storing a sum of money in the boat's locker, we were not dependent upon charity; but even had we been miserable beggars I do not doubt but that our reception had been kindly. The Dutch love the clink of coin as well as other nations, but at the Cape, at least, are simple, homely people, and well-disposed towards chance strangers; at least, towards those who are mere birds of passage. Indeed, we could scarce have been better treated had we been of the gentler sex. To women there is accorded the warmest welcome. There is not a maiden in the settlement. It is the place of all others for a damosel, even if plain and dowerless, to seek a husband, and in which to find one, or, were it permitted, a round dozen.

The governor himself was keen to hear our tale, and was very gracious. I aired my Dutch and gave him Corkran's version of our adventurings, which I confess bore but a distant resemblance to the original.

"Would you have us hanged as pirates?" said that worthy when I remonstrated with him. "No, no, our craft was the *Princess*, bound for Madagascar for black ivory, and Heaven send that Jan Van Wyk has not set foot in the town."

Fortunately for us there was no sign of the Dutchman. As we were to discover, chance gave him an opportunity of which he was not slow to avail himself, and while we idled in Cape Town and awaited Jacob's recovery, he was stealing a march on us, and

was well upon his way. Of that more anon. At present, I am concerned with our efforts to raise sufficient money to enable us to purchase a small, half-decked craft, in which to complete our voyage to Terra de Natal. Corkran was determined we should not go as passengers in any Dutch ketch or galiot which might pay a passing visit to the lagoon. It was important we should arouse no suspicions, and certainly questions would be asked if three white men of their own free will landed in such a savage place. Although many doubted the existence of a river Camissa, and though a few scoffed at the very idea of a great Empire inland, owing to the failure of repeated expeditions to find a trace of it, yet was there a very general belief that, somewhere to the north, somewhere beyond the farthest tribes of Hottentots visited, who bore the very name Inquas I had read on the chart of Obed Schryner, there existed an enlightened people who worked in gold and the precious metals.

The town was full of rumours anent them; in their idle hours the burghers discussed the question; it was a frequent subject of converse at the little wine-shop which Corkran patronised. Consequently we had no wish to have a Dutch expedition following fast on our heels, and it was essential we should proceed alone and in our own vessel.

Jacob's illness was an excuse for our lingering, and, without boast, I may say that we were popular amongst the colonists. For all that Corkran was ill at ease. He had purchased pistols and went about armed, he set me to listen and report the talk of those who quaffed ale or drank wine in the tavern, and he himself held somewhat aloof, though he was on good terms with all men. Clearly there was something on his mind; it was plain his previous experiences in this place had been such as to render his present visit a trifle dangerous to him. As events proved he might have passed undetected; the fact that he was indeed that Nicholas Corkran whose name years ago had been a byword in the young colony, who had once done a deed of violence and wrought a vengeance in a peculiarly grim and ferocious manner, might never have been discovered, had he not with that daring recklessness which was one of his features, thrust himself into prominence.

He had his reasons for so doing, he did not act out of bravado, but I confess he was rash and ran a great risk.

I have said we needed the wherewithal to purchase an excellent little ketch or coaster which chanced to be for sale. Now we had a certain sum of money which we increased by the price we got for the boat, but it was scarce sufficient. There was no use setting out upon our venture unless we were well provided with copper rings and coloured beads for the natives. Further, we required arms, new clothes, and shoes, and certain other commodities essential for travel in a country hot by day and bitter cold at night. Rugs of skin called karosses, bags to carry food, hunting-knives, and a host of trifles I need not specify, had all to be bought, ay, and paid for on the spot. There was no giving of credit in a place where vessels came and went, and where seafarers of half a dozen nations jostled each other and made their purchases.

Corkran's opportunity came at last, and I am free to confess the chance of earning money was one after his own heart. It had an element of sport in it,—there was a pitting of his skill against that of others, a glory and excitement which appealed to him. For several days he had been at his wits' end as to how to raise the wind, as he put it. Work was paid and well paid, but there was a certain jealousy of foreigners, and especially of Englishmen, entering into competition with the burghers. In any case my old sea-dog was not the man to soil his hands with farm labour or with building walls for the castle of an alien power, or in any common landlubberly way.

"Stap my vitals! no," said he; "I get my living from the sea or else I play for high stakes. To grub and delve and spread mortar or prune fruit-trees is no game for old Nick, my lad," and so he idled and kept a watchful eye on those he met, till a very fine and original idea entered his crafty brain.

"I have it, Doctor Harry," he cried one day; "I have it! Split me! an' I do not take the cocksuredness out of these smug Dutchmen, and line our pockets at the same time."

"I am prepared to believe anything about you, Captain Nicholas," said I; "so let us hear this great discovery."

"Ha, you rascal!" said he, in high good humour, "you would poke fun at me, would you? Have a care, have a care!"

His eyes shone, he was all a-quiver with excitement.

"Sit down," said I, "or you will be on the verge of an apoplexy."

"Faith!" he answered, "'tis these stolid burghers will be there when I have done with them; but here goes, my lad. It seems that in October it is their custom—a new one since my time—to hold a fair at the outlying hamlet of Stellenbosch, at the back of the mountain yonder. On such an occasion they paunch barrels of ale and puncheons of wine, even the Constantia of the Governor, deliver themselves of speeches and conduct sports and games. Especially do they exercise their landweer in the use of arms, and turn out the trained bands. Further, there is a great contest, a shooting at a mark called a papegaai, in shape like an old poll-parrot, and there are prizes for the same. He who chips off a splinter gains sixpence, a shilling goes to the man who shoots off the tail, the left wing is valued at one shilling and sixpence, the right at two good shillings, the head is priced at four; but, my lad, he who hits Poll fair on the rump and shivers him to pieces pockets five pounds—five jingling, yellow pounds from the coffers of the Most Honourable Company of Baggy Breeches, and every stiver of the money paid as entering fees, and gains the title of 'King of Marksmen.'"

"I see," said I; "'tis a mighty pretty ploy, and you think to profit by it?"

"Profit," said he; "I tell you the five pounds is as good as won. They be very fair marksmen, these Dutch, but they have not yet met one who has been a woodman in Virginia. Ay, ay, Doctor Harry, I was accounted to have the keenest eye and surest hand in all the colony, and many a bead I've drawn on an Indian's shaven scalp. When you have to shoot for your life you shoot best, and that is how I was trained in the olden days."

"But," said I, "'tis not October."

"Am I then such an addlepatte as to have forgotten the seasons?" he replied testily. "No, but 'tis not far off, and two days hence the chief farmer at Stellenbosch celebrates his

birthday. There is a fashion that the last King of Marksmen holds the title till it is wrested from him, and that is what I am about to do."

"Well," said I, "you speak of cocksuredness, but for proper complacency you would be hard to beat."

"Yet with reason," he shouted, "as I shall show. I am about to issue a challenge to all and sundry, and you must put it in the Dutch for me. The weather is excellent, and there is no reason why they should not advance their precious fair. If they do not accept my challenge they will appear timid, and his pride is a tender point with a burgher. Ecod! but I will wake them up to a right merry tune!"

"And what of your privacy?" I asked.

"Away with it!" said he. "In any case I am much altered in appearance, and am I to skulk about when there is a chance like this going a-begging? I will even risk it, my lad; so let us sink all we have in the ketch; and when I have taught these baggy-breeches how to shoot, we'll pay the balance and heave anchor in a hurry. Now for ink and paper, and do your best for me."

The man positively gave one no time to think. He was certain of his ability to beat all comers, and would not rest till I had drawn up the following astonishing document, copies of which he gave Corrobee, now recovered, to distribute in the streets, and which he himself affixed by permission of the landlord, who could not deny so excellent a customer, to the very door of the wine-shop.

"Know all men," it ran, "that Captain William Catchpenny," for this was the title he had adopted, "of the English Colony of Virginia in the Americas, being at present sojourning in Cape Town, and being accounted a marksman of no mean repute, herewith declares that he is ready, conformable to the gracious permission of the Most Honourable the Governor and the Great and Honourable Company of the Netherlands, to give evidence of his prowess with the musket at the trial of skill called Shooting at the Papegaai, held each year at Stellenbosch. As the said Captain William Catchpenny purposes to proceed

on matters of importance to Calicut, he is unable to tarry till the October fair; but should it prove agreeable to the Most Honourable the Governor and the Great and Honourable Company aforesaid to proclaim a holiday at the merrymaking presently to be conducted at that place on a joyous and auspicious occasion, he is prepared to vindicate alike the honour of his country and this his deposition, agreeing in all matters to shoot according to constituted rule and to abide by the decision of the constituted judges."

"Ho, ho!" said he when it was finished, "but that will cause a stir! Mark the cunning of it. 'Tis as humble as a starving dog, and yet has the air of a swashbuckler about it. They will never stomach such a pill, and every stout fellow in the peninsula will be keen to try conclusions. Catchpenny! Catchpounds should be the name of the said honourable captain."

He laughed till his eyes watered, and I laughed also. His mirth was infectious.

"Ecod!" said he, "were Jacob well we would have him out to wrestle their strongest man, while you and their head-surgeon might see who could poison most folk in the shortest time. Body o' me, but this is the rarest jest I have known for years!"

"We shall look precious fools if you fail," said I.

"Fail!" he cried. "Did you ever know me fail? No, no, my cock, I wager you a bottle I hit the old parrot on the rump."

"When you have the wherewithal to pay for the bottle I may take the wager," said I, and we fell a-laughing again as though we were the jolliest rogues imaginable, and not two hapless, shipwrecked men, foiled upon a mad quest, and forced to devise a scheme for supplying their pressing needs.



CHAPTER XXI

THE PAPEGAAI

CORKRAN had beyond all doubt roused the settlement. The burghers were trooping to Stellenbosch from the main town, from the farms at Rondebosch and Wynberg at the back of the mountain chain, and even from Drakenstein and the parts about Zeekoevlei, near Simon's Bay. The governor had taken a liking to the project, had proclaimed a holiday, and added a goodly sum to the first prize. He was anxious that the honour of the company should be upheld, and his anxiety spread amongst Dutch, French, and Walloons. Every burgher of any reputation as a marksman cleaned his musket, and made for the rendezvous. From early morning they began to take the inland road—mounted, on foot, and in slow-moving, creaking waggons—with their wives and families. Stellenbosch is some five-and-twenty miles from the sea, and many purposed to spend the night in the open.

It was indeed reported that prayer had been made for the success of Marthinus Diemer, the last year's champion, and for the utter confounding of this upstart Captain William Catchpenny, of the English colony in Virginia. There had not been such a disturbance for years. The whole place was agog with excitement ; it looked as if Cornelis Wolmaraans, the decent and influential farmer of Stellenbosch, was to have a birthday celebration like that of a king. We received information regarding the preparations from certain Scots of Dundee who had taken up their abode at the Cape, and, having much in common with the Dutch, lived amongst them amicably, greatly to their own profit, as indeed is

the way with that enterprising and wandering people. They had the decency to espouse the cause of the Englishman, and insisted on escorting us to the inland village, lending us horses for the purpose.

Old Nicholas had purchased a remarkably fine weapon with a prodigious length of barrel, approaching, as he told me, the type of musket used in the backwoods of the Americas, and with a stock which suited the length of his arms. He spent nearly a whole day levelling it at a mark on the wall and testing its balance and the way it fitted his shoulder, and at length declared himself satisfied. I accompanied him to the lonely seashore beyond a rocky promontory, and there he practised firing, though he did not trouble to set up a target.

"The poll-parrot will be enough for me," he said, "and the poor bird should be trembling already for his rump."

Most men, I opine, as the time drew near, would have had some qualms as to their skill, and been shaken in nerve, but Corkran set out as confident as ever. I was grieved that Jacob had perforce to be left behind, for, though he was out of bed, he was still weak and unfit for much exertion.

The journey was full of interest. We passed the swamp in which the sea-cows were wont to disport themselves—creatures of a remarkable bulk, unwieldy, with heavy, square heads, leather-like hides, sharp, upright ears, squat legs, splay feet with rounded toes, and short tails. Of these more anon. We crossed the sandy spit, the road being marked by posts; we swept round the flank of the huge mountain, and entered a region of surprising loveliness. Here were signs of tillage, cosy farms, vineyards, orchards, many young oaks, and all about the wildness of a virgin land. Herds of cattle grazed on rich grass, and we saw much sign of game, more especially of eland, hartebeest and steenbuck, beautiful horned antelope, exceeding swift and wary, the first-named well-nigh as large as oxen. Behind us the ground sloped steeply till it rose in gigantic cliffs, with kloofs in them where dwelt the lions and the leopards, though of these we saw nothing. Away in front of us and in the far distance towered other mountains, and all about was a vast expanse of plain and undulating land, over

which, I was credibly informed, roamed troops of lordly elephants.

I am powerless to describe it as I saw it for the first time, and may only mention an abundance of wild-flowers, the freshness of the air, and the cheering warmth of a mighty sun. The road was of the rudest, red and dusty; but we met and passed groups of wayfarers, all intent upon this outing and the great contest with the firelocks. Indeed, the very sailors from the ships in the bay had been granted a two days' run ashore, and were mingled with the others, as jovial as boys who have played the truant and have not been discovered.

At length we reached the most charming of valleys, bosomed in hills of divers shapes seamed by a clear stream which looped about a wooded island. The grass was long and lush; there were groves of dark forest trees where many birds piped sweetly, and the shade was grateful in the heat of the day. Here was a little colony, snug and prosperous, with rich fields, a goodly church, and a considerable company of decent burghers; and here also was the site of the contest. Tents had been pitched and booths erected, sellers of provender were crying their wares, some were making music with flute and fiddle, and others merely smoked and rested placidly in the shade.

Our arrival created a sensation, the which gratified Corkran immensely and amused me hugely, though all the time I was ill at ease, being doubtful of the immediate future. To be sure, the old rip had for once made himself presentable. Nothing could take the deep tan from his skin, restore the missing ear, and improve his wig; but he was soberly and correctly clad, wore a decent hat, and had combed out what remained of his beard. When he cast down his eyes, drew a long face, and shook his head solemnly, he bore considerable resemblance to a disreputable parson, as, indeed, he was the first to acknowledge.

"Body o' me," said he, "but I am the chaplain my father would have made me!"

He was the life and soul of our party all the way to Stellenbosch, and even the Scots were moved to merriment by his quips and oddities, though he shocked the gravest of them. We camped

out of doors, one of our new friends having travelled by waggon, which made a comfortable dwelling-place in a climate so magnificent. All night the burghers kept arriving, and our rest was broken by the cracking of whip-lashes, the lowing of oxen, the pounding of horses' hoofs, the rumble of wheels, and the noise made by the companies as they picked their places and outspanned, as it is called.

Corkran lay and chuckled to himself till I asked him the cause, for he had been careful to keep sober, though he had visions of hilarity.

"Lord love you!" said he, "think what a benefactor I am to all this multitude. Here they come from ship and mill, from castle and housework, and labour in the fields, to breathe pure air and get their livers stirred and their brains quickened. I wonder now, my lad, if they'll have their usual fair in October, and, if so, whom they will account king of marksmen on that occasion?"

"Have you no modesty, man?" I asked.

"Modesty!" quoth he; "I lie and blush at the thought of my approaching triumph. Why, the victor is given a garland for his hat, may kiss the fairest maid in Stellenbosch, and has the first pull at the governor's Constantia! Split me! but 'tis a rare jest!"

"You will look a pretty figure in a garland!" said I.

"Yea and verily, Doctor Harry; and how eagerly the fair maid will run to greet me—not that I have seen one I should care to honour."

"Methinks the wine will be more to your taste," I answered.

"A doctor excellent at the diagnosis!" murmured the old rascal, and, as was his way, dropped promptly off to sleep.

The gala-day broke bright and glorious; there was little wind, and the whole scene was to me attractive in the extreme. I had witnessed more than one *Kermis* in Holland, but here there was a simplicity about the folk and a beauty of the surroundings which had been lacking in the Provinces. We seemed far from the busy world, the air felt purer, and the whole atmosphere more wholesome. We were free from the mustiness of ages, and approached to the joyous state of our first parents in the garden of the Euphrates. Such were some of my thoughts, and I am free to

confess I was tempted to compare Corkran to the serpent. Had he not crept into this peaceful place intent on creating an uproar, rousing ill-feelings, and pocketing a goodly sum by shooting an old poll-parrot in the rump? The thing was ludicrous in the extreme, and I laughed till I was sore. The burghers, however, took the matter very seriously, especially after the governor himself had arrived with an armed retinue. He made them a short and merry speech, alluding very kindly to Captain Catchpenny, who had been unfortunate in his voyage, but, like a brave man, was bent on retrieving his position the while he sought to advance the honour of his country. At this point Corkran well-nigh upset me with a wink, though busy bowing his acknowledgments in a manner worthy of a courtier. This gathering, he explained, would not interfere with the customary meeting, but would be conducted on similar principles, though with less formality. In order, therefore, to exhibit to the distinguished strangers, one of whom he regretted was unable to be present, their method of training the landweer, it would be well to engage in pistol practice; and thereafter—here the governor grew serious and straightened his back—thereafter it was the duty of every good burgher who had any skill with the musket to do his best for the reputation of the settlement and the honour of the great Company whose servant he was privileged to be.

He ceased and beamed upon them, and the worthy folk cheered him lustily, Corkran rising in their esteem by calling for a final huzza for the governor's wife. To be sure it turned out that there was no such person; but his act seemed prompted by a kindly spirit, and he got me to explain that no doubt it would one day prove right and fitting, and at present could be transferred to the good Frau Wolmaraans.

By this time most of those who intended being present were upon the spot, and amongst them were a number of those Khoi-Khoin, or Hottentots, the original dwellers in the land. They are a yellow, ugly people, with filthy habits and no religion, much given to quarrelling amongst themselves and stealing their neighbours' cattle.

Presently the whole assemblage moved to where the ground

had been furrowed by the plough. At intervals by the side of the furrow were set up small marks, at which I found it was the custom to discharge the pistol when at full gallop. We stood and watched the burghers at this practice ; and, indeed, they are wonderfully expert, and would put to shame many trained troops of Europe. For one thing, they ride with a very easy seat, and guide their horses with their knees, so that they are able to maintain a good balance and take a rapid but careful aim.

Then some companies of their militia were exercised in manœuvring and the firing of volleys, which they accomplished with much precision, and to the fear and wonderment of the Hottentots.

At last it was time for the great event of the day, and a murmur of excitement ran through the throng. In an open space a tall pole had been erected, and on the top thereof was set a rude figure of wood fashioned to represent a papegaai, as the Dutch call a parrot.

It was brilliant with bright paint, having a red head, a green body, the right wing of a purple hue, the left wing yellow, and the tail white, streaked with blue. Its beak was brown, and its large eye, which had a benevolent look, was black and golden. So gorgeous a papegaai had never before graced the festival ; but it was deemed suitable to a great occasion, and the children were especially delighted at the appearance of the noble bird. It seemed to me a shame to destroy so remarkable a work of art, but none seemed to share my feelings, all being keen to see the splinters fly. The trial was none so easy, for I found that the marksmen had to stand a full sixty feet distant, upon the arc of a circle, at the centre of which stood the pole and the target.

It was customary for them to take their places according to the order in which they paid their entrance fees ; but for this special contest the proviso had been abolished, and they had to draw lots for their positions. As this method lessened the amount of the prize, the governor, as I have said, had generously presented a goodly sum out of his own pocket, and now sat on horseback to watch the spectacle the while the drill-master of the landweer,

an old soldier, shook up feathers of divers lengths in a hat, and called on the competitors to draw.

There were not so many of the latter as I had supposed would present themselves. It appeared that none but the most skilled thought it worth their while to oppose Captain William Catchpenny of Virginia. His remarkable challenge had scared not a few, and so but six besides Corkran drew feathers from the hat. While this function was proceeding I amused myself by listening to the conversation of the onlookers.

Opinions, I discovered, were divided.

"This Englishman," said one, "I account a vain and shallow boaster whom the Lord will bring to nought, and that right speedily."

"Amen to that!" replied another. "But have you seen him, Meinheer? He is an old bird at this kind of game, or I am much mistaken. His eyes are keen as an eagle's, and there will be none of the boy's fear about him. He will not be disturbed by shouts or cheering, nor care a finger-snap when another makes good shooting."

"If the laying of wagers and such unholy pleasures were not prohibited by the law, I would lay you five to one in gulden that Marthinus Diemer will win the prize," said a tall man with sly eyes to a little fat fellow at his side.

"Had you said rix dollars, and had the law permitted, it might have been a bargain," answered his companion readily; whereat they each produced a book and made some entry therein.

"Egad!" thought I, "our simple burghers are not wholly lacking in subtlety," and wondered who would pocket these same rix dollars.

Even more entertaining was a young maid of Stellenbosch, who clearly fancied herself a beauty, and was indeed of a fresh colour and had comely features and a plump figure. She was very eager to see the marksmen, and when at length they filed out, took their respective stations, and began looking to their flints and primings, she gave an indignant toss of her head.

"Why," cried she, "he is old and as ugly as a monkey, and bowed in the legs."

"Even so, Kleintje, but he has not yet won the prize," laughed a big-bearded man whom I took to be her father.

"Then I hope he will not; think of being kissed by such an one!"

She made a grimace, and for the life of me I could not help smiling at her chagrin, and had half a mind to say:

"Neither have you been accounted the prettiest maid in Stellenbosch."

Such a reply had been worthy of old Nicholas, who was a trifle sour where women were concerned. As for me, I had never troubled about them, save, indeed, when they needed my attentions as a leech.

I quickly saw that Corkran had been unlucky in the drawing of lots. He was at one end of the curved line, and could not get so clear a view of the target as some of the others. The rule was that the men were to shoot in order, from the shoulder, standing, and without rests for their muskets. Scanning the competitors and listening to the remarks of the crowd, I perceived that Marthinus Diemer, a young, well-built burgher, had secured a good place, firing third. He had a pleasant face, keen blue eyes, and was got up with some pretensions to finery, bearing a knot of coloured ribbon at one shoulder, and gay tags to the fastenings of his buckles at the knees. After the huntsman fashion he wore a crane's feather in his hat, and altogether was the picture of a robust and stalwart marksman.

Of the others, two were Frenchmen—Huguenots not long resident in the settlement, both swart men, but the one very tall and lean, and the other short, stout, and rubicund. These were to fire respectively second and fifth. There remained two Dutchmen, one young, the other middle-aged, who had drawn the first and fourth places; and lastly, my old man of the sea, the most remarkable figure of them all. The first of the six had a coarse, tanned visage and twinkling brown eyes; the second, the thin Huguenot, was cadaveric of aspect and miserably ill-fed; the third was Marthinus—a handsome fellow; the fourth was a grim, quiet, bearded man with steady grey eyes and heavy shoulders, and him I dreaded; the fifth was a regular ball of fat, who kept

fidgiting like a restless horse, and pitching his firelock up to his shoulder, and rubbing his stubbly chin. "A bundle of nerves," said I to myself, "and seemingly puffed up with pride. It will take him all his time to get within a yard of the parrot."

The sixth was Corkran—an object of curiosity and interest, thin, hard, broad, bowed of leg, long of arm, and scraggy of neck, with keen, mahogany-hued face, prominent nose, black and sparkling eyes, a tuft of grey beard, and a mop of reddish wig, which was visible beneath his laced hat. He was clad in sombre colours, as were most of the others ; but he was a thing apart from them, wholly distinct. His clothes were those of the land, his air that of the sea ; he looked singularly alert, and yet was as cool as the day was hot, impassive, his queer, scarred visage inscrutable, his whole bearing confident and even defiant.

The hum of excited converse ceased as the drill-master of the landweer shouted an order to commence the contest.

The first of the Dutchmen clapped his weapon to his shoulder, pressed his cheek to the stock, took a long and steady aim, and pulled the trigger. The hammer fell upon the flint, but the musket missed fire. The crowd laughed at his rueful countenance, but he was permitted to chip the flint, sprinkle fresh powder on the pan, and have another trial. This time the firelock was discharged, but to no better effect. The bullet sang away into space—not even the paint of the papegaai was scratched. The tall Frenchman fired and struck the post a trifle below the bird—a good, straight shot, but lacking in elevation. Now came the turn of the King of Marksmen. He was most particular about his aim. Twice he raised and twice lowered his gun, but on the third occasion the trigger backed, fire flashed in the pan, and straightway a shout went up from the crowd. He had shot the tail clean off the parrot, and thereby put a shilling in his pouch.

"Zeer goed ! Zeer goed !" cried the onlookers.

The bearded man, though he kept his musket pressed against his collarbone, dwelt long on his aim, and his effort was also greeted with applause. He succeeded in knocking a splinter from the left wing, and thus won sixpence. The little Huguenot

shook so much that his barrel wavered ; but he must have fired just as it was directly pointed at the bird, for his bullet chipped the neck where it joined the body, and he also gained sixpence. It was left to Corkran to surprise the spectators. He turned round so that his back was to the target, then swung quickly about, threw up his long musket, and fired.

"Hurrah !" I shouted, waving my hat, and the Scots shouted with me.

The old rogue was four shillings to the good. He had hit the poll right upon its benevolent eye and carried off its fine crimson head.

"Almachtig !" cried the burghers ; and a few of them, among whom was the governor, applauded, but the greater part remained silent, being none too pleased at this success.

Still, when all was said and done, their champion had struck the papegaai nearer the rump, and all might depend upon the second shot.

The first two competitors, having failed to touch the mark, now withdrew, some sympathy being felt for the cadaveric mortal who had indeed held very straight, though scarcely high enough.

Still there remained representatives of the three nations, and the burghers were well satisfied, there being two Dutchmen yet to the fore, and one of these the finest marksman in the settlement.

"Commence firing !" cried the old soldaat, twirling his moustachios, and Marthinus again toed the line. The silence was intense. He was quicker on this occasion, and scarcely hesitated. His musket cracked, and a yellow wing, severed at the root, took a flutter upon its own account and landed on the ground. One shilling and sixpence was now added to the winnings of Marthinus, and this was great shooting.

A perfect storm of cheers greeted his performance, and I myself clapped vigorously, well pleased that he had missed the vital spot.

Once more the bearded man, who, it appeared, was a famous hunter, took his stand and squinted carefully along his barrel. With the report the purple right wing parted company with the

body, and two good shillings were the property of Janssen the Jager.

As far as money was concerned he was now the equal of the champion, and his friends in the eager throng were loud in his praises. Those of French extraction had little to hope from the excitable Louis Jourdan, and their fears were justified, for he missed the difficult shot, and was disqualified from further participation. Thereat he wept profusely, and retired, swearing beneath his breath in a manner unworthy of his sect ; but few heeded him, every eye being turned on Captain William Catchpenny, of Virginia.

Corkran, no whit concerned, was yet content to fire as the others had done, and play no pranks. The mark was small and he had need of care. Still, there was no lingering in his aim, which proved his eye was sure and his hand steady, for his pellet left a long streak of white on the parrot's body.

Mine was the solitary cry which greeted his achievement, and he turned and called out to me :

"'Tis scarce worth bursting yourself, Doctor Harry, all on account of a sixpence. Save your breath for the next turn."

To be sure he had not hit the rump, but he had still to be reckoned with, and, moreover, had so far won nigh twice as much as either of the others. Great, therefore, was the excitement when the drill-master called for the next round.

Marthinus, encouraged by the shouts of the burghers, stepped forth, and then all was very still, and I could hear folk breathing heavily and moving their feet restlessly on the grass. The young Dutchman was taken with a certain amount of hesitation ; he was clearly nervous, but at length steadied himself and fired. There came a thud of lead on wood, but, alas for Marthinus ! he was a shade too low, and had struck the top of the post just above the hole made by the bullet of the lean Huguenot. Murmurs of disappointment were heard on every hand ; but he retired modestly, laughing at his discomfiture, so that, being greatly taken with his behaviour, I made a point of shaking him by the hand, much to his surprise.

Janssen was now left to uphold the honour of the Dutch ; but

there was no trace of anxiety on his part. He stood squarely like a rock, dwelt long upon his aim, as was his custom, and, following the report, a yell of exultation went up from the semicircle of people, while the governor waved his hat and cried, "Bravo, Janssen!"

His was indeed an excellent shot, for he had scored one side of the shapeless lump, and had come very near hitting the special spot. Still, he had not wholly succeeded, and Corkran had yet to have his chance. I confess I was agitated; I held my breath as he took up his position, but the thing was done in a twinkling. There was no delay, no training of the barrel, nothing but a quick jerk, a stoop of the head, a flash, a puff of smoke, a report, and a perfect roar from the onlookers. Hit fair upon the rump, the papegaai was blown to bits, utterly destroyed, and there remained nothing but the pole. Believe me or not as you will, Corkran, in a fair field and without favour, had won for himself the proud title of King of Marksmen, shooting well and surely under the alias he had adopted, to wit, Captain William Catchpenny, of Virginia.

CHAPTER XXII

THE YELLOW CATS

It was a veritable triumph, but the yell which greeted it was not wholly the result of admiration. In part it was a tribute to Corkran's skill ; but to an even greater extent it was the outcome of pent-up excitement, and expressed anger and chagrin. There could be no doubt that the best man had finished first, but it was easy to understand that the victory was not popular. Englishmen were not greatly relished at the Cape, and, moreover, the cool self-assertion in the challenge, and the easy air of superiority which Corkran affected, were sufficient to annoy even the stolid Dutch. To do Nicholas justice, he became most affable as soon as the affair was over. He insisted on all and sundry drinking with him ; he bandied jests, being especially amusing anent the kissing of the prettiest maid.

"Ho, ho !" he roared ; "I warrant she's gone to earth like a rabbit, and no wonder ! I will make her over to our honest hunter, who, but for a lack of quickness, is as fine a shot as any in Virginia."

Janssen, however, had slipped away, not even waiting for his money, and could not be found.

"Marthinus, my lad," shouted Corkran, "I depute to you the duty."

Nor would he rest till I had explained his meaning ; whereat the Dutchman reddened under his tan, but expressed his willingness to accept the task.

"Ay, ay, there you beat me !" laughed the old rip ; "but were

I twenty years younger—stap me! but I would match you even at that game! Body o' me, Doctor Harry, what would she say were I to whip off my wig in the process?"

He chuckled till the tears stood in his eyes, and threw a handful of copper on the grass for the children to have a scramble.

"Lord love you!" said he, "but there is something very decent about these Dutch, and bairns are the same the world over."

He had a trick of using a Scotch word every now and then, the which had commended him to our friends from Dundee, who were now quenching their thirst at his expense.

Presently the prizes were presented, the governor being lavish in his compliments, though he expressed due regret that a burgher had not won.

"Come you back, Captain Catchpenny," said he, "and we will do our best to beat you next time, even if we have to practise each day to do it."

"Tell him," said Corkran, "I will make a point of it, and take a beating like a man; but, stap me! Doctor Harry, if ever I set foot here again! The game is scarce worth the candle, and I have no wish to grace one of their young oaks or labour in Batavia!"

I translated the first part of his speech, and it was received with loud applause, so that he had to bow to the right and to the left. He himself, however, led the cheering when Marthinus Diemer and Louis Jourdan advanced to receive the price of their winnings, the latter's sixpence being a great source of merriment, and that although it was in reality an honour to strike the bird at all. Moreover, a sixpence is a very fair sum, and not to be sneezed at, as Corkran himself remarked.

He would take nothing but the five pounds and the governor's gift. The rest he made over to the sailors from the ships, who thereupon constituted themselves his bodyguard. He was at home with them, and soon had them gaping one moment and roaring the next, scratching their heads in astonishment, and holding their sides.

"Away with you, Doctor Harry!" he cried, as I endeavoured to

get him to Cape Town. "Here I am, in the company of barnacles and periwinkles and honest limpets—and here I stick till they are as full as lords!"

I got him to hand me over most of the money, however; for I feared he would be robbed, or that it would all go in graceless extravagance, and then I awaited his pleasure and watched the folk dispersing. While thus idly employed, so to speak, I overheard something which alarmed me. As I sauntered past a group of men who were talking vigorously, with their heads set close together, one of them, evidently in hot dispute, raised his voice, and I distinctly caught the words "Obed Schryner." Another of the party sighted me, uttered a warning, "Stil!" and the talk dropped to a whisper. I paid no attention, but was at once set on the *qui vive*. It was evident that some one had recognised Captain Nicholas, and associated him with the memory of Obed Schryner—that very name the initial letters of which were set on the chart of Jan Van Wyk.

Ignorant as I was of Corkran's past relations, although I groped in the dark and could not be certain whether or no I acted wisely, I did not hesitate. Corkran was safe with his bodyguard of sailors, and at the worst would be conveyed by them to one of the vessels in the bay. What was urgently required was the completion of the purchase of the half-decked ketch, the *Vryheid*, which lay off the mouth of the Fresh Water, and was owned by a fish merchant who lived in the second cross street from the sea. My resolve was taken, and, accompanied by three of the Scots who were tired of the revels, I rode with all haste for Cape Town, hoping to reach it shortly after sundown.

"Your freend," said one of these gentlemen, "is verra like to be clappit in the stocks as a disturber o' the peace. We hae here a faytherly kind o' government, and it's an ill job to be a drunken body. Noo, there was Andra Semple, a decent lad frae Glesca toon, but ower gi'en to the bit bottle, ye ken——"

He entered upon a lengthy disquisition of the troubles into which this toper had fallen, and I answered him almost at random. Fortunately he himself was loaded to the eyes, but had a wonderful balance on the saddle, so that on the whole we

made good progress, and, there being a young moon, managed to gain the town somewhere about ten at night.

Bidding the worthy trio an affectionate adieu, and leaving them vowing they would constitute me their physician did I but settle in the colony, I hurried off to the house of the fish merchant, and found him already abed. For all that, he was not averse to concluding a bargain, although he was genuinely surprised at my ungodly haste and the lawless hours I kept. I trumped up some very lame story which half satisfied him; but the sight of the prize-money brought joy to his soul, and I was soon confirmed in the ownership of the ketch, and insisted on his signing a scrip to that effect. He looked as slippery a customer as any portion of his stock-in-trade.

A curious restlessness possessed me. I hurried back to the house in which we lodged, bade Jacob dress and hold himself in readiness to take the sea; then, with the negro's aid, I conveyed all our purchases—such as a cooking-pot, hatchets, muskets, powder and shot, beads and copper rings, blankets, and other trifles—to the shore. There I stood on guard while he returned and fetched the remainder of our belongings—a small cask of salted meat, a keg of biscuits, and several bottles of wine fastened up in straw. The water barrels on board we knew to have been freshly filled, and we were aware that the ketch was also partly provisioned and supplied with a compass and other requisites for navigation. She was in charge of a man who slept aboard her, and consequently her skiff was fastened astern. I took the liberty of making use of a boat lying on the river bank, and we pushed off and were quickly alongside. We roused the crew, so to speak; and though he was puzzled at this sudden transfer of ownership, he recognised the signature of the fish merchant, and, taking his bundle, went ashore in the boat we had appropriated.

Any other man but a sailor would have made a prodigious fuss over the business, but your mariner is a great philosopher, having, indeed, no very firm hold on life at any time, and being used to ups and downs on shore as well as on the sea. Still, I was not satisfied, and, rowing to land, I returned and found Jacob ready, though perplexed at this sudden move. I explained matters as

well as possible, and helped him through the silent town to the little craft, and so aboard the ketch.

Even then I was not content. I pushed off once more with Corrobee, gained the shore, and, leaving him to watch the skiff, I returned to our lodging to await Corkran's arrival. The night was very still and very beautiful, and the huge bulk of the mountain looming up behind the little town was all in shadow, save where in the moon's rays its long, flat summit stretched as a mighty ridge three thousand feet and more above the level land.

Sounds travel far on such a night, but the burghers were bedded; and though a watchman called the hour in a sing-song voice, the quiet air was otherwise undisturbed, save for the low rumbling of the wheels of some belated waggon and the distant booming of the surf. The minutes passed. A night bird called harshly; a little black bat came circling about in zigzag flight while I paced up and down the street in which we had lodged. My thoughts were busy with the past—yes, and with our immediate enterprise, which, on the eve of its execution, appealed to me with redoubled force. To penetrate unknown regions; to meet and conquer dangers as they occurred; to be free, untrammelled, and constantly encountering startling novelties; to get at the very heart of nature; to deal with the untutored savage, and witness the wild beast of the forest and plain as God made him—the idea was inspiring, and quickened the pulse. Our strange quest fascinated me. I had heard enough here, at the Cape, to feel assured there was some such spot as this golden city—some hidden kingdom of learned workers in metal. To such we would come as a revelation, and bring them new ideas, and instruct them in divers arts. The Dutch had failed. We of England would succeed. Might we not even found a colony, and open up the land to trade? Here, indeed, was a lofty aspiration, wholly apart from any greed of gain. My fancy soared higher and yet higher. I built my castles in the air, and Heaven knows where I might have landed had I not been brought back to earth by the sound of a jovial chorus. It came from the west, in the direction of the castle, and was followed by rounds of cheering. The noise of moving waggons also reached my ears, and no doubt

The Yellow Cats

261

I had heard it before but that I was so wrapped up in my own thoughts.

"Beyond question," said I to myself, "here is my old man of the sea!"

Presently I heard hoof strokes, and then the tread of feet, and then the sound of a very merry whistling, and the calls and shouts of drunken men. At once I bent my steps to meet this crowd of wayfarers. A little up the main street there appeared several figures dancing hither and thither, waving their hands in the air, and giving vent to the silliest of meaningless cries. I drew back into the shadow of a house, and watched them go past, the advance guard of Corkran's jolly tars. Their performance was a scandal in such a reputable settlement, though, to be sure, they were their own worst enemies. Very soon the main body hove in sight, and I perceived Captain William Catchpenny, of Virginia, hoisted on the shoulders of several of his admirers, and apparently directing their choruses, to judge from the movements of his arms. Reeling figures capered on the outskirts of the throng; one musician scraped upon a fiddle, and another tootled lustily upon a horn. Lights appeared in some of the houses as they passed, the astonished burghers or their fraus looking forth with disapproval on this disreputable company. A waggon followed them, and from it were thrust numerous feet and legs belonging to members of the honourable bodyguard who had lost the power of progression. Lastly, and this was what scared me, marched several armed files of the troops of the company from the castle, intent on seeing the last of these undesirable visitors. All, however, were in the greatest good-humour, and as Corkran was borne past me he started singing with all the vigour of his remarkable voice the first verse of his old sea-song. The whole company, Dutch though they were, caught up the chorus, and to the roar of

"Yo, ho, ho!
Let the good ship go!"

reeled and lurched and capered, and were carried towards the shore, where the ships' boats were drawn up.

There was nothing for it but to follow in their wake, and I fell into line beside the waggon and its silent load. We reached the beach, and only then was Corkran set upon his legs. To my surprise he stood as steady as a rock, though his feet were planted a trifle wide apart. He insisted on singing a full verse of his ditty, and beat the measure with his metal reed as the others bellowed the chorus, and bestowed the helpless members in the boats. At the same time he kept walking backwards till he suddenly ran full tilt into me, and trod heavily on my toes. But as he did so he contrived to whisper :

"Be ready for a bolt, my lad, as soon as these swine push off."

Of a verity old Nicholas was by no means so drunk as he appeared, and was quite alive to the dangers of the situation. I confess I was greatly relieved, for I had been puzzling my brains as to how to get him safely to the skiff. I had no chance of telling him about my preparations, for the merry mariners came crowding about him to bid him farewell. The scene became truly affecting. Some wept salt tears, and even endeavoured to embrace Captain Catchpenny; but that worthy avoided such affectionate demonstrations, and tripped up a few of the most pressing, so that, being unable to rise, they had to be shipped, like their messmates, in the waggon. There were four boats hailing from three ships, and to this day I do not know if each received her proper complement. To my mind it appeared that the crews would require considerable rearrangement in the morning. Some of the under-officers were moderately sober, however, and by blows, curses, and entreaties at last succeeded in getting the last man aboard and the boats under weigh, though I am free to confess the oars moved like the legs of some spider which has got turned upon its back, and is fixed there by a pin through its middle. Somehow, the craft made progress, and slipped away from the shore, their occupants shouting back adieux to Corkran, who waved his hat to them.

"Stap me!" said he, "what a night!" and mopped his face.

"'Tis a good thing for us that it is calm and clear," I answered.

"Art right, Doctor Harry, but hand me over a dollar or two,

for I have not a penny in my pouch, and we must fee yonder ramrods if we are to win clear."

I gave him some of the money that remained, and he went coolly up to the soldiers.

"Good-night, my lads," said he. "Go wet your whistles after a thankless task; carry my respects to the governor and tell him how much I regret all this unseemly uproar."

He got me to explain his meaning, and the men, who were in charge of a sergeant, saluted, and were not slow in pocketing the coin.

"Ho, ho!" said Corkran as they marched back to the castle, "'tis the same the world over—the yellow key, my cock, the yellow key! There's never a door save that of Paradise which it cannot open. And now, is all ready?"

I was a little taken aback, for I had prided myself on my resource, and had intended to surprise him. He took a wrong meaning from the expression on my face.

"A murrain on you!" he cried roughly. "Did I not tell you to begone when you came pestering me to accompany you from Stellenbosch—and whither, and for what purpose? Is not a wink enough? Was I to explain all our plans, and those about who would like to see me swing? I know them, and if we tarry till morning we are undone. I have played the game right up to the finish, diddled them fairly, dropped them in the night, and now, forsooth, you have furled sail and——"

"Man!" I cried, "dost think every one a fool but yourself? See—yonder rides the ketch, and Jacob is aboard her, and Corrobee waiting by the skiff at the Fresh Water. There is nothing to do but shove off, get her hove, and away to this Terra de Natal."

"Split me!" said he, "but you are a lad after mine own heart—a veritable jewel; and the way you have picked up sense from me is little short of marvellous!"

"You have my thanks," I answered drily; "but 'tis scarce time to bandy compliments."

"What a night!" he repeated, and chuckled to himself with the greatest glee.

Nothing would please him but that he should return and reconnoitre the street in which we had lodged, nor would he let me accompany him. I therefore waited at the river mouth in much anxiety ; but he appeared ere long with the slightest indication of a stagger in his gait.

"They're yonder," he said briefly—"a dozen of them, and Janssen with them. They were afraid to rouse the tarry breeks, and so await my return. Ecod ! but they will be stiff by that time. Vaarwel !" and with a mock flourish of his hat in the direction of the little town he embarked, and the negro bent to the oars.

But a short time thereafter, had any been gazing from the shore, they might have seen the vessel's brown sails spread to the breeze, fill and bulge, the while the ketch slipped softly seawards, and stood across the moon's track with her bow set for Robben Island.

We were not long in settling down. Corkran was in the highest spirits.

"She's called the *Vryheid*," quoth he, "but we'll re-christen her the *Good Hope*, for she's served us well. Never have I put in so profitable a run ashore, or compassed so rare a jest. Body o' me ! but I fancied I was an old man, Doctor Harry, who was past relishing a good drinking bout or a game of skill, and now, here I am the King of Marksmen, and as full as a Thames wherry ! When I have a few minutes to myself I will clap it into metre, and put a tune to it."

In course of time he did so, and as I can still come at the words, and recall the trip of the measure, I set down the former, which to my mind have in them something of the philosophy of Cicero. But let the reader judge :

Some say a man at sixty-five
Has ceased to live, must cease to strive,
Is dull of eye, is dull of brain,
Can ne'er enjoy a jest again.
But there they lie, and cannot see
That seventy a man may be,
And yet be full of jollity—
Of right, good-hearted jollity.

A man of seventy, they say,
Had better quickly pass away.
His teeth are few, he cannot chew,
He may not drink—what can he do?
But there they lie, and cannot see
That fourscore years a man may be,
And yet be full of jollity—
Of right, good-hearted jollity.

What use, cry they, at eighty years,
Is one who's lame, and merely peers,
And blinks and nods, and by the fire
Waits for the hour he must expire?
But there they lie, and cannot see
That ninety years a man may be,
And yet be full of jollity—
Of right, good-hearted jollity.

So list to me, ye croakers all,
Who would the joys of age miscall!—
A man's as aged as he feels,
And may have mettle in his heels
Although as old as you or me;
Ay, even a hundred he may see
And yet be full of jollity—
Of right good-hearted jollity;
Though sure he is an oddity,
I grant you he's an oddity.

Such was his song, but it was not written till the *Good Hope* had made the place called in the native tongue Bubolongo.* Ere that we had encountered a great danger, had experienced as curious a peril as ever beset a company of voyagers, and in this manner.

It was not long before we discovered that our troubles were scarce over. Our compass was not reliable, so nothing was left for us but to creep along the southern limit of Africa within sight of its rugged and broken coast-line. We slipped out of the bay easily enough, giving the ships a wide berth, and, hauling sail, stood between the island of our sojourn and the promontory which looks due north. The ketch splashed along merrily, and was easily handled, the which was indeed fortunate, for Jacob was not yet fit to lend a helping hand. When day broke in glory

* The old Kaffir name for what is now Durban.—ED.

away in front of us, we were alone upon the ocean, save for a school of grampus, bustling and blowing around us, and racing us in play. The hours passed and we sped onwards, keeping the shore in sight and heading for a time due east.

"Terra de Natal," said Corkran, "occupies some three and a half degrees of latitude lying between $31^{\circ}.30$, and 28° ; therefore we must stand well to the norward, or ever we reach it. We will do well if by the seventh day we make the mouth of a river which the Dutch call the Eerste, and five days thereafter we should sight the promontory and the bar, where I was cast away in the slaver from Madagascar these many years ago. Had I that fish merchant I would slit him like any cod for shipping such a compass! As 'tis, we must hug the shore."

Consequently, towards evening we tacked closer, and presently, the breeze falling, found ourselves in the grip of a mighty current. Although by this time I had become somewhat versed in sea lore, I confess I did not recognise our plight. Corkran, however, speedily perceived we were in danger.

"By Daddy Neptune," said he, "but this accursed race seems to set straight for the shore. If the wind does not rise we shall find ourselves in evil case, Doctor Harry."

How evil was not yet apparent.

We lowered the skiff and made an effort to pull the ketch clear, but in vain. I had not conceived the power of such ocean currents on becalmed craft.

"The tide begins to make within the hour, and there is never a chart aboard," quoth old Nicholas; "we must take soundings, my lad, and make ready the anchor."

The sun sank in splendour. Rarely have I seen anything so superb in colour as the western sky on that eventful evening. A deep sapphire changed to pale purple, and this to a chaste green, and this to orange, and then to the yellow of a ripe lemon. Flung upon this background, like long islands on a flaming sea, were cast purple cloud shadows with crimson and silvery linings. Every moment they changed in form and colour, now heaped and dark, anon thin streaks in shape like the bodies of lean fish, and yet again mere feathery lines, or scattered spots. The glow of the

yellow ball of a sun illumined them, and when he dipped and vanished, the radiance yet remained for a space, and the tints shifted and spread and altered as do the hues upon an opal.

It was exceeding lovely, as though the portals of Paradise were opened wide; and the light lingered longer than is usual in such regions, so that ere the afterglow had faded, stars were twinkling in the vault, and black night was casting his veil upon the east, whence came drifting fleecy vapour masses borne by lofty currents of air.

They drifted, I say—and so, unhappily, did the *Good Hope*. We were powerless to aid her: no wind stirred her laggard sails, and we drove quietly, slowly, and yet surely towards the land. Presently a half-moon wandered up into the sky and dipped and coquetted with the night clouds, so that the whole world lay half in shadow, half in light, and the sea stretched vague and still and shrouded, till it blended with the gloominess away to the dim and darkening south. There was something in the scene which saddened—a loneliness, a mystery which became intensified when we perceived what manner of coast was this which threatened us with destruction. A moaning of surf reached our ears, and we saw a fringe of black, flecked with white, which glistened when the moon shone upon it. Above rose a background of hills, brown and black, and barren ridges, low and desolate and irregular in outline. Every here and there a long patch of silvery sand sloped from them, narrow at the summit and broadening at the base, as though it had flowed from out each gap in the crest, and spread in the flowing. The yellow rays struck on these tongues of drifted sand, and they gleamed a ghostly hue, while over them sailed the cloud shadows like passing ships with dusky canvas.

“What manner of place is this?” I asked, awed, yet fascinated.

“You will presently find, my lad, to your cost, if there is no holding-ground, or if a breeze draws out of the south,” quoth my Job’s comforter, going forward to heave the lead. “’Tis the most villainous of lee shores. God’s curse be on it!”

“’Tis there already,” said I, as I gazed with fear at the forbidding prospect, which brought into my mind these words: “The abomination of desolation.”

Yet, as I am about to show, it was not wholly devoid of life. Nearer, and yet nearer, we drew to it ; and presently the silence was broken by Corkran calling the depth every few minutes. He had found bottom, but there were yet many fathoms beneath our keel. What crawled upon this sea-bed ? I asked myself. Was it as lonely as the foreground, or did it teem with hideous creeping things which might yet account for us ?

The misery begotten of idleness fastened upon me, and I was filled with gloomy forebodings till Corkran shouted to me to stand by to lower sail the while he and Corrobee cast anchor. The cable rapped and rattled, following the splash, and ere long the ketch swung to her moorings and strained upon the rope.

Corkran came aft to where I stood.

"So far so good," said he ; "but I have my doubts as to the hawser. It is as rotten as its whilom owner."

"There is nothing left to be done ?" I asked.

"Some," said Corkran, "might pray. I am for provisioning the skiff, and putting together a raft, if we have a sufficiency of planks and boards."

The speech was like him. He had faith in a God, but he had greater faith in himself, and was essentially a man of action. So we set to work, even Jacob taking part, and the ketch tugging at our solitary anchor and testing the rope strands. Fortunately it remained calm ; yet the current ran strong, and the tide drove also against us. Ten ships' length away the sullen swell curled upon the rocks, and split and slithered upon them, and showed like snow when the moon sailed clear of clouds. This she did less frequently, for it grew darker, and many stars were blotted out.

Beyond the solemn booming from the beach and the clatter of our hammers, there was never a sound. Never a sound, I say, till suddenly the air was filled with a prolonged rumbling, increasing in intensity till it ended in something like the bellow of an affrighted ox. It came and went, a distant roaring, and all was still again ; but Jacob and I gazed at each other with blanched faces, while Corrobee cast himself prone upon the deck, and Corkran sprang to his feet.

"What is it?" I asked.

By way of answer he pointed to the shore.

I rose from my knees and looked, following the direction of his outstretched forefinger. Afar upon the crest of the ridge there stood out against the northern sky—which, though dark, was yet clear—a black and rounded mass. It was close to the apex of the nearest of the glistening, steep, and sloping sand-spits, and was motionless. I gazed at it, and could make nothing of it; but just as a heavy cloud swept across the moon's face and made all obscure and indistinct, I fancied that I saw it move.

"What is it?" I asked again, beneath my breath.

"Wait!" said Corkran, speaking also in a whisper.

The darkness lasted perchance five long minutes, and then again all was bright; and, lo! the black mass had vanished, but there was something upon the sand-slope. It needed not Corkran to tell me what it was. I knew it at a glance, lessened in size though it was by distance, and viewed only by the shifting, uncertain light of a watery moon. For the first time I gazed upon the form of the king of beasts. It was indeed a lion, standing erect and facing seawards, a dark spot upon the white sand, as though he challenged our position. As I watched him, he crouched a little, like a cat keeping guard upon a mouse.

"Ho, ho!" said Corkran lightly; "ashore we have the king of beasts, afloat the king of marksmen. The game will begin when they are both on dry land."

"Surely," said I, "'tis no time for jesting!"

"Tut! we may have no time later," said he. "But, a fig for all his roaring! I am not much concerned about a solitary——"

He paused; for what were these forms which came stealing on to the spit from the gap in the hill-ridge? One after another there appeared dark shapes cropping up against the sky, and then moving downwards to join the first-comer. A shadow swept the shore, and we waited. The shadow passed, and we could doubt no longer. Where there had been one lion there were now seven: a veritable troop of yellow cats had gathered to give us greeting in the wilderness.

CHAPTER XXIII

TERRA DE NATAL

CONSIDER our position ! The ketch was dependent for safety on a frail rope with frayed strands. At the best we relied on a mere shallop, and would have to struggle with a pair of oars against the tide and a powerful ocean current which appeared to set dead on shore. Once drawn near the surf we were lost, sucked to the sea-bottom, beaten and broken on the rocks ; or hurled on the beach, an easy prey for those eager, ruthless brutes who now watched us in a silence which was ominous. They bunched together, and made a truly magnificent picture as they stood beneath the moon's rays. The leader, a huge male, had a dark mane, and, as before, he headed the others as they began to descend the slope. They drew nearer, treading gingerly like stalking cats, and at length we perceived there were two young males and four females.

"A family party," said Corkran ; "and I will wager our first friend owns the whole harem. There will be trouble when the whiskers of these young cockerels begin to sprout."

It was curious to hear him talking with such levity ; but, to tell the truth, none of us were greatly scared. For one thing, fear was lost in wonder at this revelation of wild life in the waste places of the earth—in wonder and intense interest. For another, we could scarce believe the thing was real. The situation was such as one might encounter in an ancient and lying classic author. It seemed wholly out of place in these latter days, and its appearance of unreality was increased by the time and place of its occurrence. The pale moonlight, the flickering cloud shadows,

the vast, untraversed sea, the forbidding and lonely hill ranges with their strange spits of sand, and above all the brooding silence of night, broken only by the rhythmic boom of breaking billows, were all in keeping with a belief that this startling sight was but a figment of the imagination. Had the great lion roared again the illusion had been dispelled; but after crawling nearer with hunched shoulders and heads thrust forward, the seven stood in silence, and at times we could see their tufted tails waving to and fro. Three of them lay down, and suddenly their leader started pacing backwards and forwards in front of them like a sentinel upon the beat, moving with quick, short strides like those of a trotting dog, and halting at the end of each of his traversings to turn and look seawards and at us. Even Jacob could see them clearly, and watched them fascinated; but the negro was full of terror, having had experience of such animals in the forests of his home.

"One would think," said Corkran, "that they were guarding the continent;" and there was truth in what he said.

Out of the desert they had come, pacing from their hunting-grounds to take toll upon any who might set impious foot upon their freehold. Such were my thoughts, but for all that I could not rid myself of the idea that it was all a dream, till our head-sail, which had not been lowered, filled and flapped.

"A breeze from the south'ard," said Corkran quietly; "this is kill or cure."

Then, indeed, I woke to the full peril and horror of our predicament, and realised that seamanship, ay, and the finest seamanship, alone could save us. There was a gurgle and splashing at the bows, the ketch lifted and fell, the hawser slackened, and grew taut.

"Heaven send 'tis a capful when it comes," quoth Nicholas; "otherwise, it means the skiff, and ten to one, a shuffling out of this planet, and, mayhap, a shuffling down the throats of yonder gentry."

He chuckled harshly, but I fancied his nerves were on the stretch.

"Put the muskets and a keg o' powder and some shot in the small boat, Doctor Harry. We may find some place to land, and will have need of them."

I obeyed, dreading the worst, and armed myself with a hunting-knife and my pistols. The wind freshened, and the *Good Hope* began to toss at her anchorage.

"Stand by ready to heave!" roared Corkran, at once excited by the prospect of action.

His order was answered by the rolling, reverberating voice of the leader of the troop on shore. I glanced in the direction of the sand slope, but a dense cloud shrouded the moon's face, and all was cast in the deepest shade. I could see nothing distinctly, but the echo of the lion's challenge lingered and trembled on the air.

The negro and I stood in the bows. I had a hatchet ready, but we hoped to save our anchor in case we should yet win clear and have need of it.

The ketch rode uneasily, and the rising breeze began to hum and whistle through her cordage. A splash of spray hissed aboard, and pattered on the planking.

"Ready!" came the hail.

"Ay, ay!"

"Then up with her for your lives!"

We strained and tugged. The ketch pitched and drove forwards, the rope slackened, there was a dead weight at the end of it, and then it began to come in hand over hand.

"We're free!" I yelled.

"Then lay aft, one of you, and stand by to hoist the mainsail."

Leaving the negro I ran amidships.

Corkran was at the helm, but already the drifting craft had neared the line of rocks. She would not answer, but made leeway, and hung in the wind. It was a moment for a man with a steady head and an iron hand and a stout heart, but such a man was Corkran the Coxswain, and he bided his time.

A lively gust came sweeping upon us, and then suddenly, as the ketch sprang forward and heeled heavily, he threw his weight upon the tiller. Round she spun, heading inch by inch towards the open sea, and out thundered the last query and command:

"Is all clear?"

"Ay, ay!"

"Then hoist for death or glory!"

I bent my back, the stout wooden rings rattled on the greasy mast, the brown sail flapped upwards like a bird's wing, and Corrobee, having secured the anchor, sprang aft to seize the sheet. The canvas swung to the wind, and curved like a duck's breast, and like a duck the *Good Hope* swept upon her way.

It was the narrowest of escapes. I could have tossed a biscuit into the boiling surf to leeward, and the heave of the groundswell shook and staggered us, but we were saved by Corkran's seamanship. Inch by inch, yard by yard, we made an offing, and then tacked, filled, and hugged the wind, and crept seaward, towards safety and deep, blue water. Then, and not till then, did Corkran relax his vigilance.

"Give you good-night, my yellow gentlemen!" he cried mockingly. "You had best seek your suppers elsewhere."

The breeze bore his voice to the lone beach, bright in the moonlight, but there came no answer. This only we saw,—the whole troop of lions, seven in number, standing massed together, and watching our retreating craft as we threshed to windward. And thus they stood clear upon the glistening sand-spit till they had become mere shadowy specks and then vanished from our view.

Now, that none may think I deal with lying wonders, I have set it on record that these things happened about the third glass of the second watch of our second night at sea.

Thus, by God's mercy and the skill of Nicholas Corkran, it befell that we at length gained that very land of Natal, to which I have so oft alluded, and yet concerning which I have so far written so little.

We made a rapid passage, and after coasting along a region full of swelling, grass-covered hills, exceeding bare and desolate, and with a very grim fore-shore, we sighted the lofty headland at the eastern base of which is the mouth of the lagoon. The promontory is a bold bluff, clad with trees and low-growing bushes, where gambol merry troops of monkeys, where there are strange, harsh-voiced wood cranes, and many other birds, some of a gorgeous plumage. Beyond the narrow opening into the lagoon

is a long belt of sand, continued in a semi-circle of dazzling white, so that a great bay is formed, which is alive with fish, and more especially with sharks and dolphins. Here, also, are to be found hideous sea-snakes of all the colours of the rainbow, exceeding venomous and evil-looking, which at times swim beneath the very surface of the sea. It so haps that the lagoon itself may not be seen from the offing or outer anchorage, being hidden by the ridge of sand. There is, however, rising ground beyond it clad in verdure, while the bluff itself stretches inland like a huge rampart, shaggy with forest growth.

"A goodly land," said I, as first I saw it, but Corkran growled savagely.

His quick eyes had detected the mast of some craft rising upwards like a pole set in the sand.

"'Tis like our luck," said he; "there is some trading galiot at anchor in the inner bay."

For my part, I thought he did ill to repine after we had escaped so many dangers, and especially that which had so recently beset us; but the old rip lived for the present and the future, while I have ever been given to dwelling on the past, and considering what has happened, and what might have been. As will readily be perceived when this, my narrative, is at an end, my time is like to be well occupied for the remainder of my life.

Neither tide nor wind favoured us, so we were fain to find holding-ground a half-mile off shore, and discovered the swell to be very inconvenient, testing both our tackle and our stomachs. Still, it was well worth some annoyance to be able to feast our eyes on this unknown country, full of strange animals and strange men, of strange trees and fruits, of unknown dangers and unimagined novelties, and beyond which lay the object of our quest, the Golden Kingdom. I am free to confess I was fired with enthusiasm, and Corkran, having vented his spleen on the unoffending craft in the lagoon, was also full of eagerness. Only Jacob was impassive. He had never wholly recovered from the scurvy and the injury to his head, and rarely spoke, except when questioned. He was not morose, far from it. His smile was as kindly and genial as ever, but now and then his features wore

a vacant look, which scared me. At times I feared his wits had gone astray, and I dreaded one day to find him slaving and mumbling to himself. Still, his bodily strength was not diminished, he had benefited by the soft sea air and the salt breezes and the quietness aboard the ketch, so that he was fit to accompany us upon our arduous march.

"Look!" said Captain Nicholas, "yonder is a rare beach for turtle and their eggs. I have seen them crawling black upon it in the moonlight, and turned them by their flippers. In the dense woods are troops of elephant, which shelter therein during the heat of the day, and in the cool hours roll forth to feast on the grass of the savannahs. Ay, and there you will find the horned rhenoster, and the bush-hog, and the wood-python, and every manner of deer and antelope, and snakes a many, and coloured flies, and glowing beetles. I tell you, Doctor Harry, 'tis a wondrous land, and as full of life as I was full of the governor's Constantia. Yonder is where I crawled out of the sea, and upon yonder slopes I was chased by a bull elephant, and had much ado to get clear of his trunk. Away beyond are rolling uplands, my lad, and patches of groves and fair rivers of sweet water. These savannahs teem with game, and everywhere one may find the grass huts of the natives, a peaceful, kindly folk, who will offer us wives, and have us stay with them. Ay, they are thick upon the land as fleas upon a Spaniard right to the great mountain chain to the west and north, where dwell the pigmy Abatwa in their painted caves."

"And beyond?" I asked.

"Beyond are more plains and more hills, and a barren, desolate, unkindly stretch reaching to the borders of the great swamp itself."

"The swamp!" said I, and for the first time, strange as it may seem, recalled the fact that we had lost the book of Rhazes, the Arabian. Both Corkran and I, however, had read it to some purpose, as will in time be seen. I had accounted our chief loss that of the skin of the great gorilla, for without proof such as it afforded, one had not been able to recount the tale of Jacob's prowess at the Cape, there being heavy penalties against liars in

that fatherly settlement of the Dutch. I am free to confess, if these were exacted to the full, the revenue would be more than doubled, but let that pass. Who am I to judge my fellow-men?

The hours sped till our opportunity came of weighing anchor, and running for the lagoon. Then, indeed, we had an infinitude of trouble, having to warp the ketch across the bar. Fortunately for us, the crew of the vessel in the inner bay caught sight of us, and proffered us their aid, which Corkran accepted with a very ill grace. The negro and I took the anchor ashore in the skiff, and found these men to be Dutch from the Cape, and their galiot called the *Rode Vos*. They were very friendly, and rendered us great service, so that, leaving them and the negro on the beach, I returned and cast the lead, while Corkran steered us cunningly. It was no easy matter, and I held my breath till I found the *Good Hope* riding upon the smooth water of a huge and shallow lagoon, studded with wooded islands, and surrounded well-nigh on every side by the densest dark green forests. Such is Bubo-longo, the solitary haven of Terra de Natal.

To the east was an open patch of sward, whereon cattle and, as we afterwards found, tamed buffaloes, were feeding in several small herds. In the bay itself some of the natives were fishing on the turtle-beds. This they do in an ingenious manner, lowering a sucking-fish by means of cords, and when the same fastens to the turtle, drawing both up, and reaping the reward of their cleverness, if not of their labour.

It being the afternoon, the sun was very hot, and, wearied by the heavy work of the past week, and being safe come to moorings, we betook ourselves to sleep, and lay, all four of us, like logs till the morning of the next day. Then we had converse with the Dutchmen, and learned something which filled us with dismay, and impressed upon us the need of haste. It appeared that they had arrived ten days before for the purpose of trading in elephants' teeth, skins, feathers, and turtle shells. When passing Robben Island they had seen a man on the beach making signals to them, and showing every sign of distress. Consequently they had backed their sail and sent their boat ashore, the which had brought off a very huge, barefooted, and black-bearded man, who

stated he had been upon the island for a month, having been wrecked there when voyaging from the Provinces to Java. They had treated him well, but the day after they had reached Bubolongo he had disappeared, in what manner they knew not, but feared he had fallen overboard in the night and so been drowned.

"Drowned!" said Corkran to me. "Devil a bit, 'tis that precious rascal Jan Van Wyk, who stole the stone from me. He has now stolen a march on us, and is off up country as fast as his long legs will carry him. I will tell you this much, if we do not overtake him and recover the bauble, why, we take our lives in our hands when we venture amongst the fastnesses of the Abatwa."

"What are we to do with the ketch?" said I.

"Scuttle her," said he; "we can scarce hide her till we return."

"Might we not rather sell her to the Dutch?"

"Stap my vitals! but you are a Scot at heart, Doctor Harry. Much good money will do us in the wilderness. Still, we may bury it somewhere, and thus it may prove handy later. I do not like giving the baggy breeches even an inkling of our plans, but we will see if they will trade."

The surprise of the Dutch was great when they found we purposed settling for a time in so wild a country; but they were not the men to lose the chance of a good bargain, and though I haggled with them over the price, we effected an amicable sale of our little craft, from which I parted with regret.

Behold us, then, with our boats burned, so to speak, ready for our enterprise, and in some ways not so ill equipped. For one thing we were brown and hardy, inured to toil and danger, capable of doing with little sleep and less comfort, somewhat careless as to life, and with a firm belief in our good luck and destiny by reason of perils passed and obstacles surmounted. Jacob, to be sure, was moved by other motives, and had lost interest in his surroundings, but he came with us willingly, and brought with him his cherished hammer.

We gave the negro the chance of shipping on the *Roode Vos*, but the faithful fellow elected—an unhappy choice—to accompany us, and as he could carry heavy burdens despite the heat, he was no mean accession to our company.

We camped upon the shore of the lagoon, hard by the sandy spit, and Corkran instructed us in the setting up of a thorn hedge as a protection. After all, however, there is little danger from the wild beasts of prey in any part of the country, as they can satiate their hunger on ox or buffalo or antelope, and have a wholesome dread of man.

We found the open sward was, in reality, a sandy plain covered with verdure by reason of the first rainfalls, and the forest we discovered to be full of short-stemmed trees, flowering creepers, and undergrowth of thickets. Here and there were fair glades or meadows, spangled with flowers, clumps of broad-leaved plants and graceful date palms, such as Corkran told me grew in Arabia. I confess it would take much time and ink to write of amaryllids and lilies and irises, graceful trailers, plants like brushes, and blushing flower spikes full six feet high, trees succulent and tufted, evergreens, thorn bushes, and the most beautiful of ferns—how am I, who tell a plain tale, to halt and discourse upon them?

As for the animals, I am free to confess that at the outset we did not see so great variety of them as I had expected; but those which were evident made ample amends. For the first time I clapped eyes on elephants—ay, on herds of them—huge brutes with crinkled hides, humped backs, shapeless heads, pig-like eyes and tails, vast, spreading ears, noses prodigiously long and prehensile, curving tusks of ivory, and great, flat, four-toed feet, which, according to Corkran, are, when cooked in ashes, most juicy and succulent dainties. To tell the truth, so strange are those massive quadrupeds that at first sight of them it is a trifle hard, as Corkran remarked, to distinguish their bows from their sterns. Happily, they are exceeding inoffensive, save when attacked, and as we had abundance of fresh beef, and were not hunters of ivory, we left the herds in peace, though I loved to watch the creatures feeding in the open, or spraying themselves in the forest with the muddy water of some still pool.

I have said we had fresh beef, but we had also flesh of another kind, for the natives, of whom I have yet to speak, besought us to shoot a sea-cow, or, as some call it, a river-horse.

Of these there was an abundance in the broad water which flows into the lagoon, and I account them the most curious of created things. They also are in some respects pig-like, enormous water-hogs, with peculiar snouts, having nostrils on the tips thereof, wherefrom they blow and spout like whales. I had seen them at the Cape, but here they were in greater numbers, floating half-submerged, or with only their nostrils showing, while in the reeds were to be found their tracks, of the broadness of a waggon-road. I am persuaded that this monster is the behemoth of the Book of Job, whom no man can bind. Corkran, however, armed with his musket, proved more than its match, and by a clever shot in the eye, slew one of them, to the great joy and wonderment of the Caffres, who feasted on it right royally, and to repletion. To my mind, its flesh is most palatable when made into a broth with herbs and drunk hot in the cool of the evening.

We had but one adventure at this stage, and it befell Jacob Little, who was fond of wandering in the woods with me. Being thus harmlessly engaged, we were suddenly charged by a short and bristly boar, with ugly tusks, and a tail which stood on end, and of which the tuft drooped like a broken ear of barley. He came at us out of a belt of reeds hard by a shallow pond, and was very furious in his onset. We fled in different directions, and I did not rest till I found myself amongst the branches of a convenient tree. From this point of vantage it was somewhat ludicrous to observe the squealing and infuriated hog pursuing my comrade. The smith, however, had his hammer with him, and though, like myself, he had been alarmed at the first rush, he speedily recovered. He permitted the boar to gain on him, then sprang to the side, and wheeling about, brought the hammer-head down upon the creature's skull, and felled it, so that it lay kicking and grunting upon its side. We were not long in despatching it; but Jacob rallied me on my ignominious flight and powers of climbing.

"True," said I; "but had I been armed like you, I had never fled at all," the which, though I doubt if it were true, he could not disprove.

This fierce and malicious pig of the reeds was none such bad eating, and we smoked his hams, and carried them with us when we set out upon our travels.

Such, then, are some of the things we saw and did. And as for the natives, those we first lodged amongst are named the Amatuli, though I have heard them also called Magosses. These be Caffres, unlike the yellow Khoi-Khoins of the Cape, being black, and a very decent folk, lazy, amiable, and pleasant of countenance. To be sure, they go well-nigh naked, the men content with a double piece of cloth or woven silk grass, the women with a short petticoat reaching to the knees ; but they are fond of coloured beads and rings of copper or of iron. The men wear tall caps made out of beef tallow, and upon festivals and feast-days they stick feathers therein, and, so adorned, present a very fine appearance. They live in hut clusters, surrounded by close fences of reeds, and each house is shaped like a beehive, and well thatched. To be sure, these dwellings are dark, and stink vilely, but they are very warm of nights, and withstand both wind and rain. The natives are husbandmen, or rather husbandwomen, for it is the latter who labour and do the tilling. The men tend the cattle, build the huts, hunt, and bask idly in the sun, snuffing or drinking a bitter beer made in a somewhat dirty manner from their grain. Milk, also, they drink, especially when sour, and feed on guinea corn and eggs, goats' flesh, the beef of cattle, and on divers birds ; for they have poultry, and likewise ducks. Money they know not, trading with fat cows, and paying for wives with the same, each man pleasing himself as to number, and virgins being priced according to their beauty. Dampier is in the right when he remarks that the bride cries all her wedding-day, for I have seen them weeping, though I myself had nothing to do with the maids, as is the fashion with some when living in those parts.

There are three kinds of corn, many pumpkins, water-melons of the finest, calabashes, of which they fashion utensils, and a variety of beans. They sow earth-nuts, and make snuff from wild tobacco. As regards dainties, they fare upon the turtles aforesaid, on prunes which grow wild upon the shore, on sourish grapes, on

wax and honey, and on the game which they kill with their spears, for the assegai is their chief weapon.

They are ruled by a king or chief, who goes clad in the skin of the deer or the leopard, and is much revered and loved, and they are greatly given to songs and dancing, and the recounting of ancient tales.

So much for the Amatuli; and, being no historian, let me merely say that the same is more or less true of other tribes—to wit, the Abakwamacibise, the Amakunze, and Amaqwabe, living by the rivers in the north, and, above all, the Abambo, the greatest and most numerous. These last bear also the name of Emboas; and the others, in their order, are sometimes known as Magrigas, Matimbés, and Mapontes.

So many lies have been told about these folk that I would fain justify them further, but may not tarry to do so, and shall only touch upon their customs in so far as they concerned us when journeying amongst them. Let me say this only: That in some respects they are like the Jews, practising circumcision, avoiding the flesh of swine, and having a feast of firstfruits. Yet are they without religion, though a few believe that an unknown God, Umkulunkulu, which being interpreted signifies the Great Great, sent a mighty wind that shook the reeds, and presently there came from out them the first man and the first woman.

As may be supposed, we did not tarry long amongst the Amatuli, but set our faces to the north in the hope of overtaking the Dutchman, Jan Van Wyk. Very wondrous was the country, all forest and glade, and clear river for many miles; and then, as we mounted higher and drew away from the sea, it changed, and we were amongst bare grass stretches, in broken, hilly land, studded with thorn bushes, and there being few trees, save by the watercourses.

Here, indeed, was a veritable multitude of wild animals. Lions there were, and also leopards, but neither dangerous; rheboks, harts, and elands large as horses, wild asses most beautifully striped, deer with tails like those of cows, vast troops of antelope—some with crested heads and white bellies, some spotted, some streaked. Many have large horns, ringed, twisted,

curving, and bent ; some have manes ; and one species, dwelling amongst reeds, is hairy like a sheep. Nor must I forget the horned and ponderous rhenoster, drawn on Corkran's chart, of which there are white and black varieties, the one having a single, the other two stout horns set on his snout, and both having an armature of the toughest hide, and being sly and wary. In some rivers live long and scaly lizards, with knobbed snouts and fang-lined mouths. These smell of musk, and lie upon the mud, and lurk evilly near the silent banks, so that one has need of care when bathing or drawing water or angling for little fish.

I despair of describing all, and no doubt will again be dubbed a liar, but I have seen, shot, and eaten many of these creatures, for the greater number can be approached with ease, and have not much fear of man. There they live in countless numbers, roaming free and glorious, and feeding on the grass of the savannahs and the twigs and buds of the thorn-trees. I have heard the thunder of their hoofs ; I have seen them drinking of nights ; I have watched them speeding and bounding over their wide domains. Ostriches, fine of feather, great birds like bustards, and others which are long-legged snake-eaters, stalk over these upland pastures ; domed hills of busy ants stud them for leagues ; night wolves haunt them when the moon is high ; and other creatures also love to prowl and prey in the darkness.

It is all wonderful, magnificent, undreamed of by the majority of men, but none the less real. Further, it is beyond the power of this my pen, and life is too short to tell of it ; so let me cease, and recount how we came to the cross of wood, and how Corkran told his tale.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE CROSS AND THE TALE

FOR several days we travelled steadily, being received with much hospitality at every village, and lodged in the hut of entertainment which is reserved for strangers. The news of our journey spread through the land, and heralds met us as we approached the huts, and musicians came forth who played upon reeds, while others sang songs in our honour. I confess I was heartily amused, and longed that I could speak their tongue like Corkran. Jacob, however, was, in the opinion of these Caffres, the chief of our party. Some of them are tall and well-built men, clean-limbed and possessed of much agility, but it is safe to say that never had they imagined, much less seen, any one like the smith. His white hair was ever a source of wonder, his size and evident strength excited their admiration; they made him gifts, they offered him wives and cattle, and he blinked amiably upon them and looked about him, but in vain, for some stout warrior with whom he might try conclusions in a friendly spirit. He was inclined to be wroth with old Nicholas for having deceived him; but the hope of meeting Jan Van Wyk proved a consolation, and he only scowled at Corkran, who merely laughed at him.

"Wait," said he, "till I but whip off my wig, and then they will account me a more wonderful being even than your lordship."

"You are," said I, "certainly greater in one accomplishment, and that is lying, Captain William Catchpenny of Virginia."

"Ho, ho!" chuckled the old rip. "Lying, say you? What

matters a name when one is a man of his word? Did I or did I not shoot the rump from off the old poll-parrot?"

Thus he and I bandied our witticisms, save the mark, but Jacob grew daily more simple and silent, taking little interest in his surroundings, and at times annoying us by his stolidity. For all that his health was excellent, and he covered the miles with long, easy, swinging strides, and did his share of the work, such as gathering dried dung and brushwood for fuel when we camped in the open.

The negro was our only trouble, for the Caffres did not take kindly to him, though, as he was our servant, they offered him no molestation. Apart from this, Corrobee was an accession to our company, being skilled in the skinning and cleaning of animals, and an adept at striking fire from wood. We were lavish with our gifts, which was as well, the natives being given to thieving metal of any kind, though honest enough in other particulars.

Once or twice I had pressed Corkran to tell me the history of the chart and of his beard trinket, but he bade me have patience and wait till we had reached a certain spot which had a bearing on the tale. Ere we had arrived thereat we sighted the huge mountain chain and I marvelled at its loftiness. Still more was I surprised to find how near seemed those peaks and outlying spurs, though in reality they were many leagues distant. So clear and pure is the air, however, that it deceives the vision, the while it braces the body and tones the nerves. I specially recall the day we arrived at the place, which was one where two rivers met and mingled, because we were then favoured with the sight of a new and very extraordinary animal. A small herd of these creatures we saw in some bush country through which we passed, and where was a greater plenitude of trees than usual. These quadrupeds are exceeding long in the neck, small of head, and curiously shaped in the body, sloping from withers to tufted tail. Their hides, of a cream colour, are dappled with large brown patches, and the males have the rudiments of horns. Though ungainly in appearance and unwield in gait, they yet travel with an astonishing rapidity as I can testify; for in attempting to creep near them on my hands and knees I let them

scent me out, and thereupon they sped away like the wind, somewhat resembling ships bowling along before a stiff breeze. All about them the dust from the dry earth rose in clouds like the smother of foam about a vessel's sides, and they soon vanished over the brow of a hill, leaving me much struck with amazement and full of regret that I had not secured one of them. The natives say the lions love to prey upon them, but that there are not many in the land, and that they are cunning and can see a long distance.

We were now in the country of the Amakunze, and towards nightfall reached one of their main villages, whence, as Corkran told me, the way to the mountains and the swamp was known to him, for he had been there before. I soon found he had not lied to me, for several of the older amongst the headmen remembered him when he had spoken with them for a short time, and were extravagant in their joy at seeing him again. The people made us a great feast, and with shield and spear performed a dance before us, chanting very sweetly and strangely, and beating time the while. Thereafter Corkran rose and thanked them, and, producing his metal reed, he sounded a note and himself sang a song of his own composing anent his happy return and his pleasure thereat.

It was wonderful to hear him, and the natives squatted in a semicircle and gazed upon him with reverence, while some even wept, for he had the power of summoning up the emotions, and the occasional crack and break in his voice but intensified its finer tones.

It was previous to this ceremony, which ended in the drinking of their bitter beer known as "twala," a nauseous draught, that Corkran led me apart, and, bidding me follow him, went a little way from the hut cluster to a piece of bare ground in the loop of one of the rivers.

"This was the place," said he; "it must be hereabouts," and presently amongst some loose rocks he found that for which he looked.

It was a crumbling cross of wood, standing lonely in the wilderness, and marked the grave of one who had been a Christian.

"Here," said Corkran, taking off his hat, "rest the bones of the Portuguese, Luis da Cardoso, wrecked these many years ago in the barque called the *Nossa Senhora da Atalaya*, and here on the morrow I shall tell you all there is to know."

Consequently, the next morning, while Jacob and the negro remained to be a source of interest and wonderment, Corkran and I left the village, or, as it is called, the kraal, and made our way to the grave of the Portuguese. We were the more readily permitted to withdraw in that the natives regarded us as engaged in some form of religious rite, the place having gained the reputation of being haunted by the spirits of the dead.

"This is a land that changes little," said Corkran; "as I saw it these many years ago, so is it now; as it was when Luis da Cardoso was left behind to die, so it has continued and continues, save that the number of its inhabitants is increased."

"Left behind, and by whom?"

"By his own comrades of the ship's company; but listen, Doctor Harry. As I have told you, I was, at one time, years before I had lost my scalp and fallen foul of Poll Scudamore, cast away at Bubolongo."

"But," said I, "do I not remember you also telling me that your wig saved you from the trunk of an elephant?"

He laughed with great heartiness.

"I allow I lied to you on that count, my lad. The yarn was too good a one to be lost, and I can still see your face of wonder. Ho, ho!"

"It was scarce fair."

"'Twas very fair, I opine—as pretty a tale as ever was coined; but, there, if I spin a queer yarn now and then, yet when I have passed my word I do not break it, as I am about to show. 'Tis my code of honour, Doctor Harry, that, and the remembering of any kindness shown me, however trifling; but, stap me! if both whims have not brought me a multitude of troubles. Howbeit, to continue:

"I was shipwrecked, and, being after a time the sole survivor of the slaver, I fared inland, much as we have done, though by a different route. The fact that I was both naked and destitute

helped me, and, further, my voice was my fortune in those days. Ah, my lad, but I could sing then, ere my weasand grew stiff and my breath scanty. Many's the ditty I trolled to a gaping audience. I could make them laugh till they cried, or cry till they shook with laughter. Ay, ay, those were the days, those were the days !”

He paused, and looked fixedly away across the river, and his lips twitched a little. For once his thoughts had strayed on the backward path, and he was moved.

“In process of time I heard of a white man living amongst the natives, and, being wearied of black skins, I set off to find him. Near this very township of the Amakunze was I charged by a buffalo which I had wounded, and, after being pounded to a jelly, I was left with a broken leg, and no wish to live, a league or so on the other side of yonder rise, though haply near a water-course. Thither I dragged myself, and so managed to survive till some Caffres found me, and bore me to this kraal, where lived the Portuguese. This man had been surgeon of the ship *Nossa Senhora da Atalaya*, which, with her consort, the *Sacramento*, had come to grief on the southern coast. Both crews marched overland for the bay, de la Goa, which lies towards Mozambique and the Sofala coast ; but this Luis da Cardoso and a comrade parted company with the others, and in the course of wanderings, and after many hardships, reached a kraal of the Amahlubi people, which of all the Abambo race are the greatest, and abide to the north and east under shadow of the mountain chain. Strange are the ways of Providence, Doctor Harry ; for in this very kraal there had died in childbirth, four and twenty years previously, a white woman, and, what is more, an Englishwoman, one of the survivors of the *S. João Baptista*—the St. John the Baptist, a ship of Portugal, out of Goa for Lisbon, which, being ill-found and sorely handled in battle by two Dutch vessels of war, left her ribs also on the wild southern coast. This woman, then, whose name I have forgot, had been abandoned to die, and had died, and left among these savages an infant maid. The babe thrived, became a girl, and, ripening fast in this sunny clime, was ere long a woman, ay, and a woman of surprising beauty.

She was the old chief's ward, and had many suitors. Indeed, men were found willing to sacrifice every head of cattle they possessed, if, by so doing, they might win her as wife. As has been the case ever since Mother Eve ate of the apple, she became a source of strife and discord, till by way of gaining peace, I fancy, the old chief proclaimed that she was for no black man, and would remain unwed till claimed by one of her own colour. Consequently, trouble ceased; but the maid was regarded in the light of a goddess, and was supposed to bring good luck to those among whom she dwelt. Certain it is, that from the time of her birth the Amahlubi people date their progress. I, who have lived amongst them, do not speak merely from hearsay, they have told me so themselves.

Consider, then, the situation, when not one, but two white men arrived at the great kraal. Cardoso and his comrade, who was named Christopher Melinda, and had been surgeon to the *Sacramento*, had heard rumours of this wondrous maid, the which had been the occasion of their travelling to the country of the Amahlubi. Now, mark you, my lad, on what trifles things of moment may depend. The old chief had vowed that his ward was to be the wife of the first white man who should arrive to claim her. As luck would have it Luis da Cardoso and Christopher Melinda passed through the gap in the reed fence together, shoulder to shoulder, so that no one could tell who was the first to enter. What is more, both were conquered by the witchery of the white maid, who, if Cardoso's ravings had aught of truth in them, must have been of a ravishing loveliness, fair of form and fair of face, a veritable golden beauty. Ay, ay, my lad, you have steered clear of all such craft thus far, and so have I, as far as convoy work is concerned, so see you continue on your course, for, split me! if an honest barque can sail under the bunting that the poets call tresses. Tresses, forsooth! Women's tresses, and women's dresses, and women's caresses, they are but snares and gin-traps, Doctor Harry—reefs and shoals on which good ships founder."

The old rip took his pipe from out his mouth and spat viciously upon the ground, while I was mightily amused at his pessimism,

and shrewdly guessed he had good reason to complain, or he would never have become so exceedingly bitter anent the subject.

"It befell, then, that the daughter of the Englishwoman looked kindly on Melinda, he being the younger man, and, for all I know, the better favoured. The old chief, however, was nothing if not fair-minded, and resolved that the matter should be settled by combat. Luis da Cardoso, who was as violent in his affection as in his hate, must have made a fine fight of it, for though he was older than his adversary he mastered him, the contest being with shield and assegai, after the native fashion. Further, being of noble birth and a very decent fellow, he spared Melinda's life, and thereby spoilt his own. Clemency, my lad, is oftentimes folly, and I sometimes wish I had put an end to Poll Scudamore and Barney aboard the *Kittiwake*."

"For shame!" said I.

"'Tis easy talking," replied Corkran, "but beside the question; so hearken further, and carefully, for the tale grows intricate. "Or ever the nuptials of Cardoso and his bride were celebrated the tribe fell foul of the Amakunze people, and both white men had to take part in the expedition. The Amahlubi were victors, but Melinda, in the heat of battle, succeeded in treacherously felling Cardoso. Now, the habit of these natives is never to let the sun go down upon their wrath, and so the vanquished Amakunze having paid tribute, peace was concluded and the victors returned home, Melinda with them. Poor Cardoso was left like to die in the kraal yonder, and, though he recovered, was palsied down one side, so that he was lame and crippled. As soon as possible he got himself conveyed northward, but, in the meantime, Melinda and the woman fled together, and the old chief was so wroth that he would not tolerate the sight of a white man, and sent Cardoso back to the Amakunze, amongst whom he thereafter dwelt, a sorrowful, brooding, and vindictive man. For all that, by reason of his skill with herbs and simples, and a certain kindliness of nature, he was greatly beloved by these people, a thing of some moment, for the chief of the kraal presented him with a gift, of which I shall have more to tell. He was already an old man when I

encountered him, but he treated me with much charity, and mended my broken leg, so that I recovered the full use thereof, and otherwise comported himself as a most gallant gentleman, despite his affliction.

"Naturally, I owed him much, but at first saw no way of repaying him. Howbeit, we grew friendly, and, bit by bit, he told me his tragic story. Doomed to live and die amongst barbarians owing to the treachery of his comrade, half helpless, his rival, whom he had fairly beaten, triumphant, the thing was pitiable. Ecod! but it was great to hear him speak, to mark his fury and his grief! Eventually, when I had been protesting my gratitude, he suddenly put me to the proof. It was his wish that I should be his instrument of vengeance on Christopher Melinda. It appeared he had heard from a trustworthy source that the couple had passed safely over the mountains, escaping the Abatwas, the Bossiemans, or Bushmen, as we English call them, and had found refuge among a powerful people in the north. God knows I was a roving swaggerer in those days, Doctor Harry, and recked little of danger. Moreover, having been loud in my protestations, I could scarce draw back; so I swore to him by the most binding of solemn oaths that I would not rest until I did his bidding. Now, mark you how the chief's gift comes into the tale.

"It was necessary that I also should penetrate through the wild country of the pigmy savages, but a talisman was forthcoming. The chief's gift, my lad, to the Portuguese who now moulders here, and the latter's gift to me, was no other than yonder bauble, which you first saw in my beard, and of which I was despoiled by that thieving villain the Dutchman, Jan Van Wyk. It was not then, however, as you knew it, for there was no filigree of brass work about it; no, it was nothing but a stone, a green and hollowed stone, in shape like a shell, and in the form of a locket, being hinged with fine brass wire at one place."

"And its contents?" I asked, now full of the deepest interest.

"Stap me, but you are an impatient devil!" cried Corkran roughly. "Will you have the tale in my way, or not at all?"

I was silent, and, after puffing at his pipe for a time, he resumed his astonishing narration.

"A former chief of the Amakunze had once belonged to another tribe living near the mountains, and therefore constantly at war with the Abatwa, who are enemies of all men, stealers of cattle, and the users of poisoned darts in war. Now this chief had been made prisoner in a foray, and was haled to one of the painted caves to be put to the torture. He escaped, however, after slaying his guards and robbing one of them, who was a headman, of the green and shining stone. At that time it was indeed precious in the sight of the Bushmen, for it contained a few grains of a dried red powder, the very earth which he employed who first taught their ancestors the art of pigment-painting. It was their one possession; it constituted their history, their archives, all they valued and revered; but they lost it, as I have said.

"The chief, however, dared not live anywhere near their fastnesses, and fled and became a wanderer; but eventually landed amongst the Amakunze, who were in some disorder as to the succession to the chieftainship of the tribe. Our wanderer, by virtue of his prowess and for other reasons, was elected, and since that date the stone had been handed down from father to son. The chief who ruled at the time Cardoso dwelt with the tribe, had no offspring, and had a horror of the bauble, fearing it would some day bring his people to nought; and so, as I have said, he parted with it, or rather gave it into the keeping of the Portuguese. Cardoso believed that it would serve me as a passport, and so I took it with me, when, my strength having returned, I set out to accomplish my task.

"I passed through the country of the Amahlubi, the old chief being dead, and gained the mountains. It was not long ere I fell in with the cave dwellers, and I have no doubt but that they would have murdered me save for the green stone. Its effect upon them was extraordinary, and they clearly regarded me as a god. Indeed, I was much delayed in my journey because of them; but at last I made them understand that I was visiting all the scattered tribes of their people, and must pass onward. Then, indeed, they let me go, though they begged me to return and dwell amongst them. You will, I greatly fear, fall foul of them,

Doctor Harry, and see more than enough of them and their ways ; so there is no need to tell you more at present. They are, believe me, scarce better than monkeys—fierce, cruel, untamable and cunning, ugly as sin, yet without its attractions, dwarfed and repulsive. . . . Howbeit, we go among them well armed, and are a match for a hundred and more of them, though perchance we may find in the mountains Jan Van Wyk himself.

“As I have said, I got quit of them, and then I found myself in the most desolate of waterless lands, where I near died of thirst. I despaired of reaching the country I sought, I doubted its very existence, till I fell in with a wretched and half-starved tribe of Caffres, from whom I learned that still more to the north was a huge swamp, and that on its farther side rose high cliffs, on the summits of which dwelt a nation of warriors, who were ruled over by a white man and a white woman. Beyond a doubt they were those of my quest ; but my hopes were somewhat dashed when the natives told me that a horrid fever was bred in the marsh, and that even to sleep near it meant death at any season. I reflected, however, that Melinda and the woman must have won through, so why should not I? and therefore, with that foolhardiness which was my bane, I pressed forward.

“To cut the yarn short, my lad, I found the swamp beyond a dense jungle-land, a fearsome place—ay, and I found something more ; for, far off across its noisome stretches, I sighted a huge rampart of high land, and on the top thereof were reared walls and towers which in the sun’s rays gleamed yellow.

“Now, mark you, I had been at the Cape ; I had heard, as you yourself have done, a rumour of Monomotapa, of its great towns—Vigiti Magna, Davagul, and Cortado. In those days when Van Riebeck ruled, the burghers were hot on the scent, and every few years expeditions sallied forth only to return disappointed.

“‘Where there is smoke there is fire,’ said I to myself, though I did not believe every wild tale to which I listened. Now, therefore, it seemed that by a mere chance I had stumbled on the site of this Golden Kingdom, on the city of Cortado, no doubt, for on the charts it was set down as being in these latitudes. Bethink

you, then, of my feelings. I had discovered what others sought in vain—I had found the unknown, and yet could make nothing of my knowledge, for the fever found me.

“And now listen—listen with all your ears ! As I am an honest man, Doctor Harry, this pestilence is bred of gnats. They swarm in the jungle-land, tiny flies with spotted wings and a hunger for human blood. They feasted on me at night, and ere many days were passed I was in torment—full of cold sweats and raging heats, of headaches and of vomitings. My skin turned yellow, I was utterly prostrate ; but, being of an iron constitution, I haply recovered, and crawled back to the kraal of the Caffres in the desert country.

“What says your treatise on the fevers, Doctor Harry ? What says the learned Arabian ? Why do the barbarians in some parts coat themselves with gum, and so traverse the marshes in safety ? Tell me that, my lad, tell me that ?”

I was past speaking. The thing was incredibly strange and inconceivable. I sat and gazed at Corkran, and wondered if he were the greatest liar the world had ever seen, or if this were the veritable truth. And yet, when I come now to ponder upon everything, it seems to me that some may think the title better befits myself, although I strive to be a faithful and a truthful scribe.

“Go on,” I said at length. “Go on and tell me all.”

“As I lay ill I recognised my folly. I should have tried to circle the swamp, vast though it appeared. The natives, howbeit, told me that this was impossible, there being deep gorges at either end of it wherein coursed the river, which was the cause of the marsh itself. They gave me to understand the sides of these gorges were precipitous, and could not be trodden by the foot of man, while the valleys themselves were as deadly as the swamps. How, then, had Melinda and the woman escaped the fever ? There was the crux, and to me it remains a puzzle to this day, unless, indeed, the Portuguese, who was a surgeon, had the knowledge we possess.”

“Even so,” I answered ; “and what of Jan Van Wyk ?”

“That,” said Corkran, “will be seen in due course ; but to my tale.

"So stricken was I both in mind and body that I did what I rarely do—I struck my colours and abandoned the enterprise. I was young then, and had other things to live for, and a love of life; but I allow I should have tried again. As it was as soon as I could travel I recrossed the mountains, and did not meet with a single Bushman. The pure air of these altitudes did me good, but the fever still lurked in my blood, and I was a sorry wreck by the time I reached the chief kraal of the Amakunze. As a result my temper was none of the best, and when Luis da Cardoso, after hearing all I had to tell him, cursed me for a poltroon and an oath-breaker, I answered him hotly, and we quarrelled. His passion was his undoing, for something gave way in his brain, he lost his senses, and in a few days slipped his cable and set sail for a haven of peace, or the place where derelicts are wont to gather. I buried him, set up this very cross, and had the grace to say a prayer over him; then, sick to death of savagery and loneliness, I made for Bubulongo.

"There I found a Dutch galiot, and aboard her a trader of the name of Obed Schryner. Ay, ay, my lad, you may start; see how the plot thickens! When on this craft I drew the chart which Jan Van Wyk has stolen, contriving to get some information out of Schryner. He was a vain and cowardly boaster, who was full of rumours and had never the heart to face dangers and undergo privations. Round the coast-line he pottered from Angola to Mozambique, and amassed wealth. On the voyage to the Cape I grew worse, and raved in my delirium. Thus the Dutchman, who understood English, became acquainted with my secret, and, though I knew it not, he stole my chart and made a copy thereof. You have only seen a replica of it, drawn in secret ink and faithfully copied. At the time he used the ink aboard the galiot. Fortunately he did not know the value of the stone, for either I had not mentioned it in my babblings, or else these were so confused that he did not understand their full significance. Yet he was a wily rogue, pretending to be friendly; and when I had recovered we voyaged together to Angola, where once lived an English sailor called Andrew Battell, who has left a record of his sojournings.

"There the fancy took me to travel overland to the Cape itself, and I made the proposition to Obed Schryner. He agreed to accompany me, and we set out together, with native carriers and merchandise for trade. His heart failed him, however, and one night he robbed me as I slept, and no doubt would have stolen also the green stone but that I had devised the plan of having it set in brass work, and keeping it in my beard hairs and made fast to a chain looped through the skin of my neck. Ay, Doctor Harry, he feared to wake me, and was not quite villain enough to stab me to the heart; so he decamped with the negroes and all my belongings. I was not to be beat, though; this time I was resolute, and I marched every step of the way through a country unknown to Europeans. Then I found how their charts erred. There is a river, a great river, but not the Camissa. It flows from east to west, and its banks are alive with game. The country is indeed wonderful, a vast wilderness, in part mountainous, in part plain, and in it there is a bare region covered with a strange, low-growing scrub, a dry and thirsty land, wherein I well-nigh perished.

"Yes, my lad, I, Nicholas Corkran, am the sole white man who has traversed these solitudes, which from this very fact I look upon as English, despite all the guttural Dutch jabbered at the Cape. I had a multitude of curious experiences, and everywhere I met the Khoi-Khoi and the Abatwa. Again my bauble saved me, and rendered success possible. When we have leisure I must get you to write an account of my journeyings, for they will disprove much that is erring and foolish. I speedily found that there was no Empire of Monomotapa, no nation learned in metal work, no truth in the rumours at the Cape, no hope of realising the dreams of Jan Van Riebeck. Do you know the joy of the explorer, the wondering delight of being the first to see a river or a mountain, the feverish desire to discover more, and to come safely through it all? If not, you will presently, Doctor Harry; but it is a passion strong as that for strong drink. Let it suffice to say that lean, haggard, hard, and triumphant I reached the coast, and eventually the Cape itself.

There, in the very tavern we frequented, I one day encountered

Obed Schryner. I was sitting alone in my corner making up for time lost by drinking heavily, when he entered with several others. To my surprise he began by boasting of what he had done. He had done, forsooth ! It was what I had done ! He stated, as was indeed true, that he and an Englishman had set out to explore all the country from Angola to the Cape ; but then he went on to say that the dog of an Englishman had robbed and deserted him, and left him to continue the journey alone. I tell you it was ludicrous to hear him. He drew upon his imagination and stuffed his companions with the most prodigious of lies. He described the river Camissa, and insisted that there was a nation of fair-skinned men, whose king had entertained him kindly.

"I let him run on, for he amused me hugely ; but at length, being three parts drunk, he whipped out the copy of my chart, and proceeded to explain how he had also travelled in Terra de Natal, and seen a city whose walls were of pure gold. I myself was none so sober, and his damnable impudence, and the knowledge of his theft, and the fear that he would betray my secret, threw me into a fit of ungovernable rage. I suddenly confronted him and cast the lie in his teeth. Split me, Doctor Harry, but you should have seen his countenance ! It was as though one risen from the dead had suddenly met him face to face. I taunted and jeered at, and flouted and mocked him, and then vowed that I would blot out the lying wonders on his chart with his own blood. We fought, and I ran him through after a few passes. Then, before them all, I seized hold of a quill, dipped it in the red which oozed through the hole in his shirt, and scored out the word Camissa in both charts.

"I would have done more, but the Dutchmen recovered from their surprise and stupefaction, and set upon me. There was a regular brawl, and I had to use my pistols ; but I made good my retreat to the bay, found a boat, and escaped upon an English ship which was on the point of sailing. I know not whether Schryner died or not, but I lost his chart in the confusion and heat of the subsequent struggle, and heard

nothing either of it or of him till we picked up Jan Van Wyk with the copy done in secret ink, even to the red and wavy line which represented my vengeance on Obed Schryner.

"All this happened years ago, and though I had never forgotten my promise to the Portuguese, I saw no chance of fulfilling it till my steps were guided that snowy night to your cottage, where I found a man who could speak Dutch, and on the table the book of Rhazes, the Arabian. It was plainly a summons, my lad, and you know the rest. Let me say this only, you and Jacob Little have come thus far, but even now you may take back your plighted word, if you will. To you I took a fancy, the smith I accounted a useful ally, for there is no saying what may happen if we reach the plateau beyond the swamp. The idea gripped me to have you both as comrades, and I allow that, on the whole, you have proved yourselves trusty and stout-hearted. But what has passed may be as nothing to what lies ahead of us, so make your choice! Have you a stomach for the venture, or have you not? Tell me here and now, Doctor Henry Mortimer."

Bewildered though I was by his tale, scarce crediting his narration, there was that in the man which led me to do as I did. Never a word did I say, but reached out my hand to him.

"A lad after mine own heart!" cried Corkran, as he wrung my fingers till the very joints thereof ached and were stiff.

CHAPTER XXV

THE PAINTED CAVES AND THE POISON POTS

THERE could be no doubt about Jacob Little's decision.

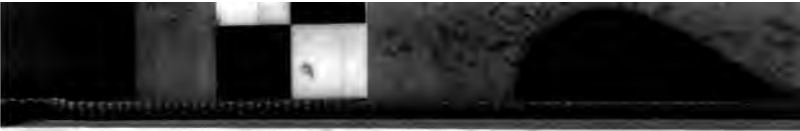
"I go to find the Dutchman," said he, and lapsed into silence.

As for myself, I begged Corkran to tell me more of his life, of his early days, and his slaving experiences, but he was not to be influenced.

"As you once said yourself, Doctor Harry," he replied, with a wink, "I shall take the matter *ad avisandum*, at present ; 'tis time we were upon the move."

Ere we left the kraal we got news of Jan Van Wyk for the first time. Rumour spreads quickly, and in some mysterious way amongst the tribes, and so there came word of a white man travelling northwards. We had been ten days' journey behind him at Bubolongo, and it appeared that we had not gained upon him. Consequently Corkran was all impatience to resume the march, and though the Amakunze were much perturbed at our departure and entreated us to stay, we bade them farewell. They accompanied us for miles, singing our praises, decked out with feathers, having their faces smeared with red ochre in our honour, and great was the lamentation when we parted with them. A kindly, jovial, laughter-loving folk are the Amakunze of the uplands of Terra de Natal.

Thereafter we travelled fast, crossed a broad and clear river, traversed very rough and broken ground strewn with loose red stones, dotted with thorn-bushes and prickly and pulpy plants, and where grew also the aloes of which a cholagogue is made.



The Painted Caves and the Poison Pots 299

Here were many lions, whose roaring we heard in the darkness, but they did not seek to molest us, and were scared by our camp-fires. We had to spend several nights in the open, the country being sparsely peopled, and kraals few and far between. Nearer and nearer we drew to the huge hill rampart, and were at last amongst its spurs and outliers in the land of the Amahlubi, the tribe amongst whom had lived the white woman of Cardoso's tale.

They are rich in cattle, and the men rich in wives, while they are more warlike than the southern folk, and greater in stature. They have need of these qualities, for the Abatwa are their neighbours, and no man can rest secure when his oxen are within reach of the thieving pigmies, the Ishmaelites of the desert.

It was with some trepidation that we advanced upon the fastnesses of those latter, mounting ever higher and higher. The air was glorious, warm yet keen, and scented with the odour of dry grass and of wild-flowers. The prospect away behind us and below us was of great extent, a wide reach of swelling rises and level plain, from which cropped up hillocks and mountains, the most with rounded tops or summits like the backs of hogs. We could note silvery threads where rivers coursed, and away in the far distance could see blue hill piled on blue hill, while over all stretched a sky of the purest sapphire and upon all a mighty sun cast his cheering and searching rays. About us and in front of us rose green mountain slopes with kloofs full of forest growth, with bare and beetling cliffs, with patches of dull red rock, with much of bird life, and the home of snakes and lizards and the barking baboon. I would I had time to write of trifles and tell of how we had to fight a troop of these dog-faced monkeys, and of Jacob's prowess and Corkran's shooting; but greater matters call for mention, to wit, our encounter with the Bushmen, and what befell in their painted caves.

Our way led towards a gap in the mountain chain, a pass amongst the peaks. Here and there we followed the tracks of deer and other animals, but for the most part trod the grass, guided upwards by small streams, which dashed down from the higher levels, and whose banks were thick with bushes. Our hope

was that we might see none of these Abatwa, for they are a race of nomads, here to-day, gone to-morrow, lodging in caves, where such exist, and at other times making themselves huts of tree branches thatched with loose reeds. Such was not the case. Indeed, our good fortune now wholly deserted us, and, in the first place, we were overtaken by the most violent of tempests. Heavy clouds, black and threatening, piled themselves above the mountain-tops and drifted towards us against the breeze; there came a rolling of thunder and bright lightning flashes ran zig-zag and crackling athwart the sky. The very insects ceased to chirp and drum in the grass, a solemn stillness brooded all about us, and nearer and yet nearer swung the advance guard of the heavy vapour masses. Presently the storm broke in all its fury. A fierce, hot wind struck us full in the face, and then there descended a deluge of rain with drops large as hazel nuts. Rattling crashes shook the solid earth, and echoed, growling and rumbling, away amongst the hills. The fire played hither and thither, and as the light faded became all the more visible and vivid. In a trice we were soaked to the very skin, and forced to crawl onwards with bodies bent and eyes half closed. It was not safe to seek the cover of the bush beside running water, and so we struggled on till we came upon a place where was a stretch of rock, a bare and lofty cliff. We crouched at its base till a shout from Corkran apprised us of a discovery. He had found the entrance to a cave. It was a narrow slit, lengthy and irregular in outline, but we quickly passed through it and found ourselves in a rock chamber, gloomy, and in parts dripping with wet from the roof. Far back in its recesses we discovered an overhanging ledge beneath which the ground was dry and sandy, and there we sat us down, wearied and wet, to pass the long and comfortless night. Corkran, however, was not satisfied till we had built a rampart of stones breast high at the mouth of the cavern. There was need of care. Our powder was damp, our muskets therefore useless, and we knew not who were the tenants of this place, which might be the home of wild beasts or wilder men. At present, as far as we could tell, it was empty, silent as the grave, save for the occasional splash of dripping drops from its invisible roof. Corkran himself mounted guard at

The Painted Caves and the Poison Pots 301

the entrance and there remained till midnight, when he roused the negro, who took his place.

The night passed quietly, and, despite our sorry plight, we slept, for we were wearied with our exertions. We slept, I say, till the dull light of early morn came filtering in through the opening. It revealed little to my eyes, for it did not penetrate far within the cave, and could not dispel the gloom which shrouded us. Drowsy and loth to move, being both stiff and sore, I lay upon my side and gazed idly at the negro's form outlined against the wedge-shaped patch of grey sky, which showed above our rampart. Corkran and the smith yet slumbered, and the water-drops still gathered and fell and sputtered on the floor. I counted them, one—two—three—four, and noted the regularity with which the sound of their impact recurred, and then my attention was directed elsewhere, for somewhere above me, somewhere in the darkness, somewhere high up in the cave wall, I heard something moving. Something, nay rather, many things, a gentle pattering, a rustling, a coming and going, nothing to which I could give a name, but beyond doubt caused by animals, living creatures of some sort or other. The sounds apparently did not reach Corrobee, he did not turn his head; but, leaning on the ridge of the stone wall, looked out from the cave for coming danger.

There was a stealthiness about these movements which alarmed me, and I shook Corkran by the shoulder. He woke at once, and gripped the haft of the knife in his belt, but with a low "hist" I enjoined the need of silence, and together we listened. The noises had ceased; strain our ears as we might we could hear no sound, and I was about to explain to my comrade why I had awakened him, when from above us there came a single, twanging note, such as is made by a tense cord vibrating to and fro.

Now, at the moment I was again looking towards the negro, and thus I saw a dark speck flash across the sky-space towards him. Next instant he uttered a cry of pain and turned himself about. It was as though a wasp had stung him in the back. I was about to spring to my feet when Corkran forced me downwards with all his strength.

"Lie still for your life!" he whispered, and then I understood.

The negro had been struck by the poisoned arrow of a Bushman.

I have read tales of courage and devotion, but I can pit against them the true history of the death of this poor savage. He could not tell whence came the secret attack ; he knew his peril, for we had impressed upon him the dangers we ran, but he knew also that if he came back to us we would be discovered and perish with him.

"Massas !" he cried ; "I dies, but I dies here. Dey not finds you, dey not finds you !"

Thus he shouted in his pigeon English, and though I would fain have gone to him I could not deny the wisdom of Corkran's words.

"You cannot aid him," he growled into my ear ; "'tis no use, lie still, for your life !"

A second bow-string twanged, and again Corrobee started. A third sounded, and he twisted his body this way and that. It was pitiable to see him writhing against the patch of sky, but presently he groaned and sank down within the rampart.

"Poor devil !" muttered Corkran in his throat, almost as if he sobbed, and I could tell he was in a fury.

My only hope was that our faithful black did not suffer greatly, and that the poison was as quick as it was sure. The light was faint, but we could see his body stretched out upon the floor of the cave, and twitching at intervals. At last it straightened out and stiffened, and as it did so, Corkran woke Jacob Little and clapped a hand upon his mouth, for the smith was given to prodigious yawning. There we lay, the three of us, under a ledge far back in the dark recesses of the cave, and waited for what would happen next, while every moment the light grew stronger and spread farther within the rock chamber. Remember our powder was yet wet, we had no useful weapons save our knives and hatchets and Jacob's hammer, and the cave harboured those who could slay from a distance, as, alas ! we knew. The question was, where were they, and would they discover our presence ? I confess my heart beat a tattoo on my ribs as I cowered and waited.

The Painted Caves and the Poison Pots 303

All at once I perceived a figure hanging by its hands and outstretched arms from the wall, full twelve feet from the ground, on the same side of the cave as ourselves, and near its entrance. For a moment I was not certain whether it was man or monkey, so dwarfed and ugly did it appear. It loosed its hold, dropped to the floor of the cave, and with a crouching gait approached the body of the negro. I saw then it was indeed a human being, a pigmy, crisp-haired savage, naked save for a few pieces of fur, and carrying a tiny bow in one hand. When erect the man was scarce taller than a white boy of twelve years, and looked deformed, his head being sunk between his hunched shoulders, his chest narrow, his body paunched, and his lower limbs lean, though thick at the joints.

He stooped over Corrobee, pushed the body with his foot, and then, raising his head, uttered a cry like that of a wild animal. By way of answer four others, bearing a close resemblance to the first, appeared hanging to the ledge, and dropped, as he had done. More followed, and they began to talk in a guttural, clicking speech, and utter noises indicative of surprise. It was clear that none of them had ever seen a negro.

Our position was now dangerous in the extreme, for presently there were a couple of dozen of these hideous dwarfs swarming about poor Corrobee's corpse like jackals round the carcase of an ox. We scarce dared to breathe, and sat and watched them as they gesticulated and examined our stone rampart, and leapt upon it, and brandished their bows. Every instant we dreaded lest some of them should stray towards us. True, we might account for several, and, had our firearms been available, might have wreaked vengeance on them for the murder of the negro, but we were at a disadvantage. To be sure their darts might be unable to penetrate our clothing, but of that we could not be certain, and in any case our hands and faces were exposed. A scratch might mean death. Had we not seen evidence of the deadliness of their poison? It was hard to say how we were to escape. The ledge above us was inaccessible, the cave wall being smooth and affording no foothold. I was puzzled as to how these Bushmen had reached it, but the matter was speedily explained.

Drip, drip! The drops splashed at intervals, and then from the darkness behind us came the noise of some one or something scrambling among rocks. I felt Corkran move, and, glancing at him, I was able to perceive he was on the alert. He had got softly upon his feet, and now squatted on his hams, a bare knife in one fist, his whole aspect that of a cat ready to spring upon her prey.

A coughing and grunting reached our ears, and then from out the gloom glided the squat figure of a cave-dweller. He did not see us in our recess, and ran forward to join his tribesmen, carrying a bow and having a furry skin depending from his shoulders. He passed us, and with one silent, speedy spring old Nicholas was on him. I saw an arm rise and sink, I heard a gurgle in a throat, and Corkran was again with us, and with him the corpse of the Bushman, whom he had stabbed to the heart.

There was something horrible in this stealthy attack, in thus taking a life unawares, but it was a stern necessity, and, what is more, the thing he brought back to us seemed scarcely human. Just then, however, there was no time to examine it. Handing me the bow, and taking the body on his shoulders, Corkran whispered to us to follow him, and led the way farther back into the cave. We advanced cautiously, and trod very softly, the ground fortunately being smooth and not cumbered with stones. It was not so dark but that we could see each other's shapes, and Jacob and I crept after Captain Nicholas, who groped onwards, and at last came to a halt. He had discovered a steep and rocky path leading upwards to the ledge. Still carrying the Bushman, whom, as he afterwards told me, he intended to use as a shield if attacked, Corkran began the ascent, and here we had need of greater care, owing to loose stones and the noise our shoes made upon the rock.

It was a difficult task, for Jacob and I were carrying Corrobee's loads as well as our own, and the faint glow of light about us served but to increase our hesitancy and make us imagine pitfalls and dangers which did not exist. Happily we met none of the enemy, and gained the ledge, which now turned out to be a broad platform. It narrowed towards the cave's mouth, and that



The Painted Caves and the Poison Pots 305

portion of it was plainly visible, as was the greater part of its edge. Away back towards the rock wall it was shrouded in the gloom which yet possessed so much of the cavern.

We quickly perceived this was where the savages were accustomed to live, no doubt as a precaution against beasts of prey. The ashes of a fire rested on a level part of the rock ; there were several piles of bones and deer horns, and here and there tree branches were heaped together and hides spread out ; but what made Corkran drop his burden and hurry forward was the sight of a row of wooden pots ranged close to the cave wall towards the other extremity of the platform, just where it narrowed to a ledge. He took care to keep out of sight of the crowd below us, and, on reaching the pots, he knelt and examined their contents, and then returned, bringing one of the vessels with him.

"Ho, ho !" he whispered ; "here is the wherewithal ; now we have them."

"What is it ?" I asked.

"Their arrow poison," said he ; "and we have also a bow and a sufficiency of darts, but come farther back a moment, lest they see and hear us."

We retreated a space and then made our depositions.

Corkran was set upon holding the path by which we had climbed, it being his purpose to shoot the enemy one by one should they attempt the ascent. I feared his aim would be uncertain in the dark, but he vowed he could scarce miss, and in any case could creep to the edge and let fly at them as they passed below him.

"No doubt," said he, "there is danger, but I warrant you the odds are with us, and our poor nigger will have company ere long. I do not think," he added, "that they can board us forrard, cats though they be ; but do you, Jacob, stretch yourself out yonder, so that they cannot reach you with their darts, and if a head comes cropping over the bulwarks, deal with it as though it were an horseshoe, my lad."

The smith nodded, and crawled forward on his hands and knees to his appointed place.

"As for you, Doctor Harry," continued our leader, "get the

powder sprinkled on the driest place you can find. The sun will be up presently, and there may be a chance of its drying, only as you love me move quietly, the lighter it is the better for us. If you get a chance you also can crack a skull with the butt of a firelock."

So saying, he crept back to the top of the path and made ready his weapon, which was fashioned of a tough and pliant wood, tipped at either end with bone, and having as cord a string of dried tendon. It was a very miserable and paltry-looking bow, but the danger lay in the little shafts, with smeared tips, which we had found in a wallet of skin fastened about the Bushman's waist.

I had a moment wherein to examine this native, and found his countenance both crafty and repulsive. The upper part of his face was very broad, especially between the ears, but below that level his visage was diminutive and shrunken. His chin did not project, and what is curious is the fact that he lacked ear-lobes. He had no beard, but his trunk was hairy and his skeleton was composed of small bones very rough on their surfaces, as I could feel, for the creature was to my mind half-starved. I left him lying, and, after spreading out the powder from our flasks, I took a cautious survey of his kindred, who still swarmed about the negro and had begun pulling the rampart to pieces and prying between the stones. Amongst them were several women, even more hideous than the men, and I am free to confess that the whole crew looked like deformed fiends.

The sight of them shocked and sickened me. To such degradation might man descend! Since then, however, I have been pleased to imagine him as having ascended from this low level, a more comforting reflection, whether or not it be the case.

What I could not understand was how our entrance during the night had not disturbed the Abatwa. We had talked freely, built up a stone wall, and made sufficient noise to wake the soundest sleeper, while these strange beings were born hunters, beyond doubt keen-sighted and quick of hearing. Further, they had given no sign of their presence throughout the dark hours. What wonder, therefore, that I was puzzled?

I have said that these savages were hunters. As a conse-

The Painted Caves and the Poison Pots 307

quence, it was not long ere they made a discovery as soon as they had demolished our ramparts, and thereby let more light into the cave. They detected the imprints of our footsteps, the marks of our shoes. At once their excitement redoubled; they ran hither and thither like dogs nosing out a trail, and then, bent double, began to trace us back into the cave. It was exceeding curious to watch them from above, and look out away beyond them to the green slopes visible through the gap in the cliff; but the crisis was approaching, and dragging myself to the edge of the platform, I lay *perdu*, now and then cautiously raising my head to get a view of them, and having a musket ready by my side. Every moment more light was entering the cavern, and stretching farther within it, so that I noted the opposite wall was smooth, and could not be climbed, and also that upon it were divers figures painted in a dull red pigment. I had not time to take stock of them, for the savages speedily reached the place where Corkran had stabbed one of their number. Thereupon they set up a great wailing and crying, while some of them dropped upon their knees, searched the ground, and then ran backwards towards the light to see the nature of the sticky fluid which clung to their fingers. That they could smell blood was evident. As hounds surround the spot where a fox has been killed, and sniff eagerly and yelp and whimper, so those cave-dwellers crowded about the place where the tribesman had met his death, and clicked with their tongues and cried shrilly. One of them discovered where we had rested under the overhanging ledge, and they swarmed in beneath me, jabbering and gesticulating. I drew back and held my breath. Their next movement would be to scale the path.

So far Corkran had given no sign of his presence. Each minute passed and gone favoured us, for we could see better and yet remain as before—invisible, or nearly so. Corkran, indeed, had the post of danger, for he was open to attack by any ascending as we had done. Still, he was so far concealed by a boulder and a projecting spur of the rock wall, and had the advantage of position. I could just see his form, shadowy and indistinct, and from his attitude knew he had an arrow on the string ready for the boldest of the Bushmen.

Presently the cries of grief and dismay changed to those of anger. The creatures snarled with rage, and I could hear them scuffling out from below the ledge.

"Now," said I to myself, "will they have the pluck to face the unknown?"

My question was speedily answered. These Abatwa, animals rather than men, had the courage of the unreasoning brute, and next moment a bow-string twanged. Corkran had launched his shaft amongst them. The sound was followed by a shriek of pain and terror, and some of them sped down the cave and gathered at its mouth. The chances were they knew nothing of white men, and this sudden assault upon them with their own weapons added to their fear and surprise. I lowered my head and lay pressed close to the rock—a wise precaution, for several of them loosed off arrows which sped harmlessly above me, and struck the cave wall at my back. They were shooting at random and wasting their darts.

Again Corkran's bow hummed, and I knew he had not missed his mark, but certain of them gathered in the deeper recesses of the cavern, and began shooting in his direction, so that their tiny shafts pattered on the platform, flying past Corkran, who cowered behind the boulder and bided his time. All at once some of those who had fled sought to create a diversion. They ran across the cave and sprang upwards with the greatest agility, intent on catching hold of the margin of the ledge at the part where it was the least distance above the ground, the spot guarded by Jacob Little. It was full twelve feet of a leap as I have said, and these Bushmen were tiny creatures, but so lithe and active were they that a couple succeeded in their effort. Ere they could make another movement the smith, even as he lay at full length, brought his hammer down in four crunching strokes upon the four separate sets of black fingers clutching at the rock. It was enough. Two yells rang out, and the pair who had thus striven to gain a footing, dropped hastily to earth, and I fancied they would be unable to handle their bows for many a day. It was then an idea came to me, and, turning round and crawling backwards, I reached the body of the man Corkran had slain, and dragged it and myself



The Painted Caves and the Poison Pots 309

to the verge. Gripping it by the loose skin of the back, I thrust it upwards and purposely made a little noise to attract the attention of our adversaries. My ruse answered admirably. A dozen strings were plucked, and well-nigh the same number of arrows thudded softly into the skin of the dead man. I gave a cry and let him fall backwards, the while I distinctly heard Corkran chuckle in his corner.

This plan of mine was one after his own heart. I picked out no less than eight of those venomous shafts, for the Abatwa were admirable marksmen, and shifting my position I again raised the body. For a second time I cheated the pigmies, and harvested another six of their arrows. I felt I was drawing their teeth and waging a bloodless battle. Great therefore was my pride. Once more I sought to deceive them, but they had grown wily, and those far back in the cave never stirred, while the rest gathered under the shelter of the ledge.

A dead silence fell upon us, broken only by some one in a last agony, and the intermittent splash of the water-drops. To tell the truth I began to feel some pity for these miserable, ill-fed wretches, to whom we had meted out a stern justice. It was speedily dispelled, for to my surprise and horror a dart went whistling past my head, coming, and here was the strange thing, directly from behind me. We had been taken in the rear. It was evident there must be some other opening into the cave, and that the numbers of the Bushmen had been reinforced. Scarcely had I realised the situation when I was struck upon the back. Fortunately, the tiny dart did not penetrate to the skin, but for all that I was in a quandary. I dared not turn for fear of exposing my face, and so I uttered a shout to warn my comrades, and made myself as small as possible, dragging my coat about my head, and then keeping my hands below me. The posture was both uncomfortable and undignified, while I could not be certain but that an arrow might strike me with such force as to inflict a wound. A third missile hit the sole of one of my shoes, and I began to wish I had never seen Corkran, much less become his travelling companion.

The cold fit, however, speedily passed, and I resolved to make

an end of the intolerable suspense. A sudden spring and a dash at the lurking foe was better than remaining to be a target for poisoned darts, and if my movements were rapid I might escape being wounded. Consequently, I sprang to my feet, turned myself about, and received full in the chest the body of a Bushman.

For once Jacob's vision had served him well, and in the semi-darkness he had seen what to me was invisible. He had risen, rushed to the back of the platform, and now appeared to be dealing very effectively with the foe. At the moment I did not appreciate his efforts, for the savage, who otherwise would have driven against the wall opposite, struck me with the force of a battering-ram. Instinctively I gripped him, but was swept off the ledge, and in a twinkling was on the broad of my back upon the floor of the cavern, dazed, and with the breath well-nigh shaken out of me. The wonder is that I was not killed, or at least sorely injured. By great good fortune I fell flat and on a sandy patch, but, considering the height, and that I am a large and heavy man, my escape was remarkable. Heaven knows I had no time to wonder how my bones had fared, for with a yell the whole horde of pigmies, who had been sheltering beneath the ledge, hurled themselves upon me. Well was it for me then that I had caught hold of the Bushman. I covered myself with him as best I could, and, stunned though I was, fought desperately for life. Haply they did not use their bows at such close quarters, but stabbed at me with knives made of bone. My legs were my vulnerable part, and I received several wounds in the fleshy part of both thighs, but I managed to protect my body and face. Still, the struggle could not have lasted long. I was only half conscious, but can yet recall the horror of feeling myself surrounded by these dwarfed fiends, of hearing their shrill cries, of striving to ward off their blows with the writhing, slippery body which I grasped fiercely with both hands. I feared the knives were poisoned, and this added to my distress of mind, for all the time I was thinking fast and furiously. To tell the truth, I have but a confused idea of what happened thereafter, and so must relate the tale as Corkran



The Painted Caves and the Poison Pots 311

recounted it to me when we were delivered from this most pressing of perils.

It seems that Jacob did not observe what had happened to me, but dealt with a second and third savage as he had meant to deal with the first. One he fastened upon before he could stir, and sent him hurtling to his death against the rock, so that he fell close beside me, a disfigured, twitching mass. The other he caught by the legs as he was creeping into a hole which opened on the platform, and served him in the same way. A fourth came crawling out of the rock tunnel only to meet a similar fate. Such slaughter was enough to terrify the boldest—these repeated thud-dings away above them, this continued dropping of the limp and bruised and lifeless forms of their kindred, was too much even for these primitive and beast-like men. The great smith was roused, and the lust of battle had gripped him. I had told him of Corrobee's devotion and fortitude at the time of the shipwreck, and he had seen the negro's body lying where he had been treacherously slain. Jacob Little, kind of heart and placid in nature, would never on his own account have wreaked so terrible a vengeance on hapless savages, but he took good care that our faithful black should not quit this world unattended. As it was, he came very near sending me to keep the negro company, though, to be sure, he made amends by striking terror into the hearts of the filthy company who sought to hack the life out of me with their knives of bone. To add to their discomfiture, old Nicholas fell upon them with the hatchet, and, imagining I was struggling with the wretched being whose body I used as a shield, he shore off the creature's head by one shrewd stroke, whereat, overcome with horror, and already utterly exhausted, I lost what little senses I had left.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE GREAT SWAMP

It was broad daylight, even within the cave, when I returned to life; and I discovered that Corkran, with that instinct he possessed of grasping an opportunity or taking advantage of anything likely to aid him, had bestowed me on the floor, so that I received upon the face the heavy water-drops which fell steadily from the roof. The back of my head rested in a pool, while the frequent splashings on my countenance had speedily served to rouse me. I found that I was full of aches and smartings, so much so that I was content to lie very still, and do nothing but avoid the drops striking me upon the eyes the while I sucked at the trickle which coursed towards my chin and gathered on my lip hairs, for I was exceeding thirsty. For a time I was extremely vague as to my whereabouts, and had no clear idea of what had happened till Captain Nicholas himself came and stood over me.

"Stap my vitals!" said he; "but y'are as tough as a shark-skin, Harry, my lad. How goes it?"

"If you mean my head," I answered feebly, "why—round and round," for, indeed, I was as giddy as a drunken man.

"No matter," he chuckled, "you have come round like your head, so don't round on me for clapping you under this fountain, which is like one of the tortures of the Inquisition in Spain."

He laughed heartily at his play on the words, and called out to Jacob to come and lift me. The smith did so with infinite care, and bestowed me on the grass outside the cavern, where I lay



The Great Swamp

313

and drank in the keen mountain air, and closed my eyes and hearkened to the wind rustling beside me, and the joyous chirpings of a small bird which hopped among the stones. The horror of the morning was forgotten, and I was content to know I yet lived, until I recalled my fear of the Bushmen's poison. Corkran, howbeit, reassured me. By way of precaution, he himself had sucked my wounds, but there was no trace of the deadly drug on any of the knives the cave-dwellers had left behind them in their flight. A panic had fastened upon them, the women being first affected, and they had scuttled from the scene of strife with Corkran hard at their heels, though he had been careful not to follow them beyond the cave mouth. By degrees I heard the whole story, and learned that Corkran, venturesome as ever, had explored the rock tunnel, and without harm to himself had discovered that it communicated with another and smaller chamber in the rock, also adorned with paintings.

And here let me say something as to these pigmies who so nearly made an end of me. Since those days I have seen more of them and their habits, and am convinced they are the original dwellers in the land. They have little to commend them ; and, indeed, their miserable stature and scurfy skins and low development ceases to be a matter for wonder, when one reflects that their customary food consists of bulbs, and of insects and the lower reptiles. Thus they devour locusts and caterpillars, and account a tortoise a dainty. Some say they eat snakes, but this I question ; for I believe they hunt serpents merely to extract the venom, which they use in the manufacture of their arrow poison. At times they succeed in slaying a mammal, and then are very disgusting in their orgies, highly esteeming the entrails, though they reject the gall, and, curiously, enough, four pieces of the meat from the inner sides of the thighs.

I have already sufficiently described their appearance, but the pity is they have lost the art of pigment-painting. The drawings done in red upon the cave wall were the works of their ancestors, and yet were wonderfully vivid, and very excellent representations of what they sought to show. There were pictures of animals, principally those of the chase—such as deer or antelope—and one

complete hunting-scene, cunningly rendered, wherein figured men with bows and having dogs with them. I have read that the tablets of many ancient and cultured peoples are oftentimes lewd and repulsive, but I am bound to confess the products of the imagination of this savage painter were free from such defects. Further, they were instinct with life; his animals looked as though they ran, his men as though they walked; he had been in his day an artist of no mean repute.

From the fact that I am able to describe these wonders, it will be apparent that I recovered, and such was the case, my wounds (thanks to the excellence and dryness of the climate) healing with a marvellous rapidity. Corkran and Jacob Little had rolled a boulder to the mouth of the passage, so that we were safe from attack in that direction. As, however, our powder was rapidly drying, and as we could rear a stout barricade at the cave mouth, we no longer feared the Abatwa, who in any case had been so roughly handled that they were not likely to return. Jacob had slain three, Corkran had accounted for four, and though I had none to my credit, yet I had played my part in the fight, and was given some praise for my ruse, though old Nicholas vowed I had taken my cue from him. I was glad none of the women were among the slain, and was not sorry that no death lay at my door, for it is a solemn thing to take a human life, even if it be that of a dwarfed and naked savage.

Considering everything, we had been very mercifully preserved; and as soon as I was able to travel, quitted this spot of ill-omen, leaving behind us our faithful black and the bodies of his slayers. Corkran, who ever made the best of things, accounted the whole circumstance fortunate, for we secured several bows and darts, and a supply of the poison, thus saving our powder and shot, which might be all important when we arrived at the city with the walls of gold. We were still far from it, according to Corkran's reckoning, and though we had no other adventure of note amongst the mountains, we were hard put to it when we reached the barren lands at their base, and sallied out upon a sea of grass. It rippled like waves as the breeze swept it, and the light played upon it cheerfully, and its smell was kindly and heartsome, but it was



The Great Swamp

315

void of water, and our sufferings were great. A thunderstorm, during which fell torrents of rain, saved us, even though we had to shelter from it in one of these great earth-clefts which are common, deep trenches in the red soil with channelled and moulded sides, and not infrequently the abode of beasts of prey.

Again we reached hilly ground where was little game, so that hunger gnawed our vitals. The country lacked inhabitants, and was swept with violent winds which drove across it, laden with a stinging and suffocating dust that no man could face. I might write much of our wayfaring—of the shifts to which we were put, of our search for food, and the dangers we ran from lions and mountain leopards; but these be side issues, which served but to harden our bodies and strengthen our minds and quicken our brains, the while they bound us more and more in the bonds of amity. We discovered no trace of the miserable tribe which Corkran had encountered years before, but at last drew near the wooded country, which, on the south, bounded the pestilent swamp. It was then I took counsel with myself, and consulted with Corkran. From what he had observed on his last journey thither, he was of opinion that one night must, in any case, be passed amongst the marshes, so great was their extent.

"If we start on the morning of one day," said he, "and travel steadily, I allow we might gain the cliffs after daybreak on the second."

"You are certain," I asked, "that these stinging gnats bite only during the night?"

"As certain as I am that they breed and carry the fever."

"'Tis indeed remarkable that Rhazes should speak of the natives coating their bodies."

"Ay, ay, Doctor Harry; we are ever too ready to cry: 'Lo! we be the people, and wisdom shall die with us!' These ancients were not the fools we think them; and we shall do well to look for this tree with red berries and a pulpy leaf, of which he speaks."

Now, though I have not mentioned the matter, the Arabian, in one passage, entered fully into the description of the plant from which the gum was derived. Both Corkran and I had read that

it was smooth of stem, save at the junction of its several parts ; that its leaves were rounded at the tip, doubly ribbed in the centre, and very thick and fleshy ; and that it bore a profusion of red and wax-like berries, which grew in bunches and yielded a sticky juice. It was, so said the writing, a lean tree, growing in shady parts where the ground was wet. Further, the book had it that some believed it exuded an oil which floated upon the surface of any water. The Dutch physician who had translated the work had, on his own account, added a pious note pointing out the wonderful care of the Creator, and citing the docken and the nettle, and how certain poisons have their very antidotes as bed-fellows.

We had read all this with interest, but I confess that till Corkran had supplied the clue I could see no sense in such precautions as the barbarians were said to take. I had been taught, and firmly believed, that fevers were bred of humours, of exhalations, of the *materies morbi*, and at times were sent upon us as a judgment ; but here was a new theory ! Was I to scoff at this layman, to jeer at his notion that tiny flies with spotted wings, night-rovers and blood-suckers, were the *causa causans* ? More than once had I seen grave illness follow the bite of a dung fly ; a high fever result from the attack of wasp or bee. Still, it is easy to err, to attribute everything to that which is most obvious, to jump to a conclusion instead of weighing the pros and cons, and dealing logically with the whys and wherefores.

For all that there could be no harm in putting into execution this curious procedure, provided we discovered the lean tree of the swamps. The very finding of it would be a strong argument in favour of this theory which I was busily working out within my brain. Another thought arose. Granted these gnats infected the blood, and thereby the whole body by their stings or bites, was it not possible they might cause the fever in other ways ? Death was common to them, as to all living things, and their foul bodies, it seemed to me, must at times fall into water. Now, were this water drunk, might not the deadly essence be absorbed ; might it not gain entrance to the system, and so cause the disease ?

I have said that this is no learned treatise, but surely the matter is simple and full of an abiding interest ! I doubted whether any truth lurked in this idea, for it is a fact that the Caffres of Terra de Natal when bitten by an imamba or other deadly serpent do not hesitate, but, having killed the reptile, slit it open and devour its gall, thereby recovering in many instances. Further, their witch doctors use serpents' venom in their potions, for I have seen these prepared in the kraals of the Amakunze.

I confess the matter was too deep for me, but, reasoning blindly, I came to the conclusion that it would be well to abstain from drinking any stagnant or stinking water, and to carry with us a supply from a water-course outside the jungle belt in which, as in the swamp, lurked the spotted flies. Corkran, who I grieve to say, was at times inclined to scoff at my knowledge of the healing art, forgetting what he owed to me in days past, thought but little of my notion.

"Go to, Doctor Harry," said he ; "I have drunk water thick enough to stand upon, and vile enough to turn the stomach, and was never a whit the worse."

"That," said I, "is no argument. For one thing, all men are not built on your lines."

"For which," he replied, "they have my pity ; but let it be as you say, my lad, and we'll see what results from it. I have no wish to again become the shivering and yellow wretch who quitted this region in the days when Cardoso lived."

A strange region it was when we reached it. The higher land was covered with a dense growth of thorn bushes through which we forced our way, following the tracks of animals, which were very numerous. It was also firm, stony, and coated with long coarse grass. We found a clear and rapid stream running towards the swamp, and filled our bottles of skin well-nigh to bursting. The ground rose and fell in a succession of low ridges, and our view was limited, so that night fell ere we gained the spot whence Corkran affirmed a sight of the cliffs and the walls which were built upon them could be obtained.

"The flies," said he, "haunt the lower levels ; here we are safe."

So it proved, for we passed the night in comfort and feasted royally on a water-buck which he shot in a patch of tall reeds by the side of the stream.

All this time Jacob Little grew more and more taciturn, and complained occasionally of pain in the head. The poor fellow had fallen into a melancholy condition, and more than once told me that he was convinced he would leave his bones in this wilderness.

"Nonsense, man!" I was wont to say, "if feeble folk like Corkran and I can worry through, surely a lad of your thews and sinews can meet and conquer difficulties!"

"I am willing enough, doctor," he would reply sadly; "but I was better at my forge, and the quest grows wearisome."

"Wait till you meet Meinheer Jan Van Wyk," said Corkran, "then you will have your hands full."

"Yes, I will wait," answered the smith; and once more became stolid and imperturbable.

I was thankful that his brains seemed sound enough. His depression was largely due to the vastness of his surroundings. He felt, as he said, lost, a mere speck in this huge, desert land, and the condition taxed his mind. Accustomed to a petty life, a daily round, and to play therein a conspicuous part, his ideas could not keep pace with the new circumstances under which he found himself, and our giant was sore bewildered. His brain was slow, if tenacious, and events were happening too quickly for him. We were well to the north of Terra de Natal, while he, I verily believe, was beginning to realise his life at the Cape. Such a mental condition was indeed curious, but somewhat painful to witness and irritating to the beholder. Now and then it put Corkran into a fume, and even disturbed my own accustomed equanimity.

We were awake betimes, and as the sun sprang upwards on our right, gazed fixedly to the north. From the ridge the ground sloped away till far below and in front of us it was shrouded by a thick haze, a gathering of dense white vapour, which stretched like a floating cloud to the utmost limit of our vision.

"Yonder," said Corkran, "lies the deadly spot, but you will see it more plainly presently."

It was even as he said. The sun rose and cast his rays full upon this mantle of mist, and ere long it began to break and to dissolve. The sight was worth the witnessing. Long rents appeared in the vapour mass, which then began to swirl and eddy like water in a ship's track. Anon, it heaved into hummocks, split lengthwise into streamers, and then rose in feathery spirals and wavy rings which floated hither and thither and vanished as the sun kissed them. As it thinned, tree-tops came cropping through it, and looked like islands in a sea, while in parts the light played upon it with the shifting colours of a mackerel's skin, or a pigeon's sheeny breast. It was truly marvellous, and I watched it spellbound till tree blended with tree, till beyond the tree belt appeared low-lying land, wherein glittered a multitude of water patches, and till Corkran raised his arm and pointed with his forefinger.

"Look!" said he.

The last vestige of the mist away on the verge of the horizon suddenly parted in the midst like a curtain which is rent and rolled away to either side, disclosing a long line of high land, a mighty rampart of buttressed and precipitous cliff, dwarfed by the distance, but for all that bold in outline and very clearly defined. Yet this was not what caught the eye, was not the cause of the astonished cry I uttered, for set upon the edge of this lofty plateau rose what I took to be great walls of stone, having towers placed here and there with no attempt at symmetry or order. Even as I gazed the full rays of the morning sun struck upon the face of this headland, and illumined the structures wherewith it was crowned.

Then, indeed, I doubted no longer.

"Look!" cried Corkran again; and lo! the walls and towers were no more a blackish-grey as they had been. Wherever the sunlight bathed them they gleamed a golden yellow, the colour of minted guineas. There could be no doubt of it. Far off though they were, and how far I could not say, the whole picture was distinct. The air, now that the clinging and billowy masses of

mist were gone, was that clear and transparent ether common to those altitudes. My eyes could not deceive me—and I, Doctor Henry Mortimer, here and now affirm once again that the light which was reflected from these structures on the cliff-tops was of the purest amber. Nay, more, in places it sparkled and glowed. It was no dull gleam, but a glitter, such as might come from burnished metal, and that metal the most rare of all.

"'Tis true!" I cried, "beyond doubt, 'tis true!"

"Ay, ay," said Corkran, "but tarry a moment, and you will think your eyes have cheated you."

Again it was as he said. The sun mounting rapidly changed the direction of his rays, and no longer illumined the face of the distant plateau, at least, not to the same extent. In a moment the wonder was at an end. The broken line of wall remained, as did the towers, but both were now of the same hue as the cliff wall on which they were perched. The vision had come and gone, and had I stood there alone I could easily have imagined that my senses had deceived me.

"At sunset," said Corkran, "you will again be reassured. Yonder, I take it, lies the Golden Kingdom, the long-sought Empire of Monomotapa."

"Forgive me my lack of faith," said I. "Your tale was hard to credit, but seeing is believing."

"Did I not tell you, Doctor Harry," answered Corkran, who was aquiver with excitement, "that I was a man of my word? No doubt my yarn sounded like those of Sir John de Mandeville, like a tale from the 'Thousand and One Nights'; but I have proved my assertions, have I not?"

"You have indeed," I answered solemnly; and we clasped hands upon it.

Jacob could scarce share our joy and hope, for his sight could not pierce to such a distance, and so he had to be content with my account of those things I had seen.

"What next?" was all he said—"what next?" and indeed there was a grain of sense in his solitary remark.

Corkran, practical as ever, was ready with his answer.



The Great Swamp

321

"I opine," said he, "we must now find the tree with the crimson berries."

"Then we had better descend," I replied, all eagerness and anxiety.

"Never a step do we go," said my old comrade, "till we have put food into our stomachs. True, there is no danger from the gnats till night has fallen, but the air is foul and close and heavy even at the confines of the swamp, which itself is farther off than you would suppose."

"Good," said I, and recalled a maxim of one of my learned teachers at Leyden, that to visit a fever case when famishing was a tempting of Providence. The same, I took it, would hold good for a place where a fever was bred; consequently we broke our fast, and then, shouldering our loads, resumed our journey.

It took us two good hours to reach the trees of the swamp, and the change in the atmosphere was remarkable. Clear, crisp, and of a stimulating warmth on the summit of the ridge, it changed at its base into a dank and heavy vapour, full of moisture, of great heat, and distressed us sorely. The sweat poured from us, we were stifled and oppressed, though the novelty of the place in some measure diverted our attention from the discomforts we endured. All along the margin of the marsh grew mangrove bushes with twisted stems set high upon tangled clumps of roots, which rose from the soaking soil and from pools covered with scum and a green slime. The water was full of spongy frogs' spawn, and the air was the home of insects, especially of gaudy and gossamer-winged dragon flies, which flitted hither and thither, their blue and green bodies—long, jointed, and slender—shining in the sun. Reeds and rushes stood in patches, erect or drooping, and formed an outer belt wherein lurked water-birds, and where I saw a species of tufted crane. Bubbles rose from the oozy mud and floated idly on the surface, or burst softly and without cause, while hideous lizards played amongst the branches. Further, there were water-snakes, flat-headed and venomous in aspect, which lay coiled amongst the gnarled roots, or hung from the tree-limbs like withered creepers.

Rest assured that we did not see all this at once. I do but

recount in a few successive sentences what we encountered during that depressing day, and I am free to confess the limit of this noisome swamp was the most unholy spot in which I have ever been. It surpassed in horror the silent lagoons of the oily river Ogobo.

For hours we searched, but all to no avail. In parts there was a profusion of vegetation, but nothing resembling the plant we sought, the lean tree with rounded, pulpy leaves and red and wax-like berries. Fatigued and distressed, we hurried back to healthy ground ere the onset of night; but once upon the ridge and refreshed by another meal, Corkran persuaded us to travel several miles to the westward, so that on the succeeding day we might explore another portion of the edge of the morass. I was the more ready to accede to his proposal in that, as the sun set, I had again seen the yellow gleam from the cliff-tops and felt that joy of the explorer which Corkran had foretold.

Soon after daybreak we were once more upon the quest, but at first with no better success. Nicholas was forced to admit that on his last journey he had seen no tree such as that we sought, but then, as he reminded me, he had known nothing of its importance, and had been sick unto death, a prey to the deadliest of fevers. We were disheartened, and, like rash fools, half willing to attempt the passage unguarded, when it fortunately occurred to me to survey the swamp beyond the tree belt. This we did, stepping and springing from one arch of roots to another, now and then finding firm ground, and anon hard put to it to cross some fætid, slimy pool. All the time we had to keep a keen outlook for snakes lurking in the branches, and, as a matter of fact, slew two reptiles, one with green scales, the other brown and mottled. It was a vile and hateful nightmare of a place, this wood of the marsh, with its crawling, creeping life, its stillness, gloom, noisomeness, and silent bubble-bursting.

We breathed more freely when, after much exertion and several narrow escapes, we were quit of it, and had our feet on a patch of firm meadow-land—an islet, or rather a peninsula, set in the surrounding swamp. There were many such forming a network all over the surface of this huge bog, which was a mixture of thick



The Great Swamp

323

mud, reed patches, and ponds and lanes of scum-coated water. Aquatic plants spread their broad fronds over the surface of pools, lilies bloomed amongst the rushes, the air was sickly and alive with insects. Innumerable birds had here their home—long-legged waders, long-beaked eaters of frogs, a multitude of duck which rose in scurrying haste and tailed into a long line of rapid flight. Beetles with twitching legs, working like oars, propelled themselves hither and thither, tadpoles with waving tails swam beneath the surface, the grass was full of hopping frogs. The sun struck hotly on the moist expanse, and vapours rose in many parts, the horrid miasm of this forsaken spot. Here and there on the tiny islets were dotted bushes, and it was on one of these oases that I, to my surprise and wonderment, stumbled upon the object of my quest.

It was indeed a lean tree, of no great height, but smooth-stemmed, and having nothing like a bark or shell. The colour of its trunk was bluish-green, and it had nodes at intervals. Its branches sprang forth at these nodes, and were bare up to their extremities, where they carried clusters both of leaves and berries. The leaves were not doubly ribbed as Rhazes had it, but in other ways conformed to his description, and the berries, each of the bigness of a hazel nut, were of the hue of coral. Berries, I say, but they were not real berries; rather, I take it, a curious form of fruit, more of the nature of nuts, for there was an outer pulpy portion enclosing a black and shiny shell, which in turn enclosed a yellow kernel. Astonished though I was, scarce realising that our efforts had been crowned with success, I could not doubt the evidence before me. There could not be two such trees nourished by swampy soil. True, the plant did not wholly tally with the description, yet was I convinced that once again a merciful Providence had guided us aright, and that this was indeed what we had come to term "the fever-tree."

Already it was wearing late, and we made haste to strip it, till, when we had finished, it looked leaner than ever, having lost both leaves and fruit. Further, we made incisions in its smooth stem, from which exuded a milky juice, though nothing of the nature of an oil. With all haste we retraced our steps, had an infinity of



trouble in crossing the tree belt, but haply left the lower levels behind us ere black night swept down upon the scene and ere the pestiferous gnats swarmed forth in countless hordes to seek their food.

Wearied though we were, I never thought of sleep till I had tested the effect of fruit pulp and kernel, and likewise of the leaf juice upon the skin. The book had not stated what was the effective portion, and unhappily I commenced by smearing myself and Jacob with the thick juice of the leaves. Corkran, the cunning rascal, had no spirit for the enterprise, excusing himself on the ground that he had to cook the remainder of the buck's meat. Thereby he was able to enjoy our discomfiture, for the stuff produced an intolerable itching which well-nigh drove us mad. Jacob was a sight to see, rubbing and scratching at his face, slapping either hand in turn, a mass of misery; and, to tell the truth, I was little better.

"Ho, ho!" cried Corkran, "'tis a great thing to be a leech, and still more the patient of one;" but his merriment was short-lived when he considered what was at stake.

In desperation I applied the pulp of the berry, and to my joy found that its greasy smear relieved the itching. Still it was not of the nature of a gum, and consequently my attention was directed to the yellow kernel. It had a peculiar odour, and was, I at once found, full of a stickiness which boded well. What, then, was my chagrin to find that it also caused a most distressing itch.

It was Corkran who solved the difficulty.

"When you have finished this performance," said he, "perchance you will try a mixture, and see what that can do for you."

Believe it or not as you will, he had found the clue. By grinding up the kernel between stones, and mixing it with the crushed pulp and a little of the leaf juice to make it more fluid, we produced a gummy substance, harmless to the cuticle, and yet adhering to it very firmly. Satisfied with this result, and with our enthusiasm again fired by the sight of the yellow walls gleaming in the rays of the setting sun, we agreed as to the night watches, and resolved on the morrow to attempt the most hazardous of our ventures—the crossing of the great swamp.



CHAPTER XXVII

ICHABOD

It was done, the Rubicon was passed, and, what is more, apparently in safety. Of this there could not as yet be a certainty, for according to Corkran, several days elapsed after being bitten ere one began to grow hot and cold, to sweat and shiver, to turn deadly sick, and be racked by pains in head and back and limbs. Such was his belief, and he would always have it that camping for a week on the lower levels had been his undoing at the time of his previous essay.

"Ay, ay," he was wont to remark, "I might otherwise have gained the farther side."

"And died there, belike."

"Mayhap, Doctor Harry; but 'tis better to die and have done something than to have lived and accomplished merely living."

Such was his maxim, and I opine that the men who lay it to heart and act upon it will be accounted the greatest, and will advance their country in no small measure.

Still, despite our doubts, we had good reason to hope that we had not acquired the poison, for our protective gum had acted admirably. We had been careful to smear our faces, necks, hands, and forearms, and, indeed, every part liable to be exposed, and we had fastened up our clothes so as to baffle the most persistent of the fever-flies. I grant you we were uncomfortable, disgustingly so, and more especially when the heat softened the outer surface of the gum. Never again do I desire such a filthy experience,

but, as I am about to show, we were in some measure rewarded for our sufferings—yes, and according to our several desires. We took every possible precaution, sustaining our bodies with a hearty meal before starting, thanks to Corkran fixing a poison dart in the hide of a water-hog, refilling our water-skins, and, as I have said, transforming ourselves, as events proved, into veritable fly-catchers. To be sure we refrained from using the gum till we camped for the night, and by that time we were well out into the marsh, and had gained a tiny hillock, dry under foot, and having brushwood upon it so that we were able to make a fire. Never have I spent so curious a night as that passed in the centre of this oozy, water-logged stretch. In the first place, as soon as it grew cool and dark there arose a strong and aromatic smell from the divers flowers and floating plants; in the second, every frog lifted up his voice and croaked with huge delight and the most incessant vigour; in the third, lights glowed and glinted in the sedgy grass, and gleaming insects darted this way and that, or hung in the air like tiny lamps; in the fourth, there came the sound of heavy creatures plunging in the pools, or wallowing in the mire, and an oft-repeated blowing and snorting of which I could not imagine the cause; and in the fifth, we were beset by the swarming gnats. These midges were not all of one species. There were those which trumpeted and settled with a shrill and humming note, there were the silent visitants with spotted wings, little grey fellows, with very long legs, and a variety larger than any of these, having yellow bodies and unspeckled wings tinged of the same colour. One and all were keen to feed upon us, though they disliked the pungent smoke from the damp wood. They lit eagerly, and were at once entangled in the sticky mess. Nowhere did we feel their bites, but in the morning our appearance was, to say the least, remarkable. Our hands and faces were literally studded all over with the bodies of these greedy insects. We were black with them, the most curious-looking beings it is possible to imagine.

“Split me!” said Corkran, “if we have not all night long played the part of three jars of preserves!”

“To my mind there are no more gnats left in this region,” I

responded, and then could no longer forbear giving vent to my mirth at the amazing sight my two companions presented.

Each of us then started laughing at the other twain, even Jacob being tickled, despite his stolidity.

A closer inspection, howbeit, revealed the fact that we had not wholly escaped unscathed. For one thing we had neglected to coat our eyelids, and both the smith and I had been bitten thereupon, moreover we were stung in the scalp, and on this account Corkran jeered at us in high good humour.

"A sorry time they must have had striving to draw blood from my old wig," said he; "of a verity here is a new advantage in being scalped. We live to learn, the while we learn to live."

He was delighted at his immunity, though I hinted that no decent gnat would dream of sucking his sour blood. But let me say, here and now, that we must have escaped those which breed the fever, for none of us suffered. This very fact has made me doubt Corkran's hypothesis, though again it is curious that if the foul miasm be the cause we were not affected. In any case I can merely state the fact that we spent the night in these pestilent regions, and yet had no reason to regret it.

Our second day's journey was uneventful. We cleansed ourselves to the best of our ability, Corkran and I having much trouble with our beards, feasted on what was left of the water-hog, and were rewarded at sunrise by seeing the golden gleam from the ramparts. We were now much nearer the plateau, and could note where the light played on patches of green grass high up on its mighty flank. The march towards it was tedious in the extreme. We were forced to proceed by devious paths, and to spring here and there across lanes of filthy water. Jacob came near being bogged in one part, and the heat was stifling. The remnants of the gum melted and mingled with the sweat which poured from us, our loads seemed leaden, and the distance to be traversed interminable.

"Courage!" cried Corkran when we flagged, and "Courage!" we echoed, though it oozed from us like the bubbles from the mud. We were soaked to the waist, bespattered with slime, as unhappy wights as Bunyan's Christian in the Slough of Despond,

but following our indomitable leader we at length won clear. The ground became drier, it sloped upwards, patches of bush diversified it. No longer did we fall in with the fever-tree, though we had seen it on several occasions in the swamp. Upwards we toiled and reached a ridge whence we gazed back at the noisome stretch below us, and forwards and upwards at buttressed slopes, seamed by dark kloofs, shaggy with wood and rising to the grim cliffs which frowned on us as though they would bar our way.

I cannot describe the revulsion of feeling we experienced. True, we could not see those yellow ramparts which crowned the rocks, but it was enough for us that we were on solid, kindly earth, amongst wholesome green grass and shrubs and trees and flowers. Of these last the most remarkable was a species of white foxglove, tall as a man, which grew in a little dip of the hillside, on the banks of which we halted. There we camped, drinking in the pure air, and giving thanks silently each in his own manner, for perils safely past.

Night, a night free from the plague of flies, changed to day, and our morning meal was of the most frugal, for our sun-dried meat was nearing an end. Still we continued to ascend, following some track which led upwards, and ere long found ourselves amongst gigantic grey boulders and pillars of fantastic rocks. At midday we rested hard by a stream of joyous water which splashed merrily down the mountain side, all unconscious that it went to feed the stagnant pools and slimy ponds of the pestiferous morass. We were in a clear space amongst the stones and boulders, a very fair spot, shut off, as it were, from the world, a cosy, homely corner of the flank of the plateau.

Jacob had passed a few reflections on the unfitness of our diet, and as Corkran also had a palate for fresh and juicy meat, it befell that the old rip wandered off to look for game after bidding us remain where we were till he returned.

"Moreover," said he, "keep a sharp look-out. We are nearing the abodes of man, and we know nothing of the temper of the folk who dwell in this outlandish place. You can signal to me by firing a musket."

He took one of the firelocks with him, in addition to his bow and a dozen of the poisoned arrows. He had grown wonderfully expert in the use of the latter, and was very skilful in stalking the wild creatures which formed our food. His life in Virginia had taught him how to follow a trail, and the necessity of seeing that the wind blew from the quarry and towards the hunter.

Left to ourselves the smith and I collected branches and heaped them together, struck our flint and steel over a sprinkling of powder, and soon had a tiny but cheerful blaze before us, which would serve as the beginning of a cooking fire.

Jacob, whose sight was always feeble in the bright light of day, and who never lost an opportunity of sleeping, composed himself upon his mighty back, and was soon snoring pleasantly ; while I, mindful of Corkran's warnings, took one of the loaded muskets and went and sat upon a rounded piece of rock and smoked my pipe. Tobacco we still had, and accounted it the greatest of our treasures, though our stock was becoming perilously small. Having sucked at the stem till the juice gurgled in the bowl, I grew thirsty, and walked to the rivulet, where I drank my fill and then returned, slowly revolving many things in my mind, and wondering much what might await us in the immediate future. I am free to confess that my wildest imaginings had never come within a mile of the truth, for as I was about to enter the space from between two columns like the stones of the ancient Druids, I perceived that Jacob Little was not alone.

Over his sleeping figure stooped the form of a white woman. Picture, if possible, my feelings at this apparition. Surprise, bewilderment, and curiosity fastened upon me in the same moment, only to be succeeded by a lively apprehension—for the woman was armed ! She carried a broad-bladed, stabbing spear. Was this the sole effect ? you ask, good reader, perchance slyly, especially if you be of the gentler sex. Well, being but human, and having seen no female of my own colour since quitting the Cape, I must admit I was strangely stirred—ay, stirred to admiration—and with good reason. To be sure, I only saw the back of this uninvited visitor, but it was a back well worth the seeing. Such views are apt to be deceptive ; but it was enough for me to note

that the woman had the figure of a young maid—a tall, lissom form, clad in clinging white. Over her shoulders streamed a wealth of hair, which in the sunlight shone like threads of spun gold. A thick tress of it fell on either side of her face as she bent over Jacob, whom I reflected even then would assuredly lose his wits if he were to waken suddenly.

“What next?” he had asked. His perpetual questionings were answered with a vengeance.

I noted the woman wore sandals with guards of leather at the ankles, and I marked how slender was her waist, circled by a broad belt of scarlet beadwork; how rounded and elegant was her shape; how broad and firm those parts of her shoulders which were visible. Her very attitude was full of grace, the unconscious pose of a wild animal; and—believe me or not, as you will—I experienced an over-weening desire to look upon her face.

Suddenly she straightened herself with a quick movement of her head, tossed back the glittering masses of her hair, and shifted the spear from her left hand to her right. There was not a moment to lose. I trembled for Jacob's life, and, leaving my firelock against one of the rock pillars, I stole forward on tip-toe, holding my breath, and treading silently. Ere she could make another movement I had thrown both my arms about her, and she was my prisoner. My prisoner, I say, but far from wholly mastered. Strange to relate, she uttered no sound, but began to struggle desperately. For so slender a maid she was possessed of exceptional strength and activity. Her lithe body twisted and writhed; she strove by every means to elude my grasp; and then, all at once, set two rows of sharp teeth into the muscles of the ball of my right thumb.

“The vixen!” thought I. “The confounded little vixen!” and felt glad she could not use her spear upon me, for it was a very ugly weapon.

The pain I experienced caused me involuntarily to loosen my grip upon her, and in endeavouring to again hold her fast we both staggered forward and fell across the smith's prostrate body. Further, the sharp point of the spear entered his forearm, so that

he was wide awake in a moment, and, intent upon his own safety, seized upon us as we lay.

For the first time I realised in my own person the immensity of the smith's strength, and so did the poor maid, for she gave a cry of fear and pain.

"Jacob!" I gasped, the breath well-nigh squeezed out of me; "let go—as you love me—let go!"

"Doctor Harry!" said he. "God bless me! What does this mean?"

"You speak English!" cried an eager voice, "you speak English!"

"Mercy on us!" I exclaimed, "and so do you!"

With that the three of us found ourselves sitting on the grass, staring at one another with faces expressive of the very utmost astonishment. I confess that I looked more at the woman than at my comrade, who was hugging his wounded arm, and whose mouth was wide open. My late prisoner made a perfect picture—a picture of beauty taken by surprise. Her eyebrows were arched; her eyes, soft and dark—a marked contrast to her fair tresses—full of a wondering delight; her nose, a very proper nose, quivering at the nostrils as she got back her breath; her lips—a veritable Cupid's bow—parted so that I could see those very pearly teeth which were the occasion of the smarting in my thenar eminence, as that part of the hand is called which she had bitten. Her bosom rose and fell, and her little fingers opened and shut as she clenched and unclenched her tiny fists.

"Madam," said I with much gravity, getting upon my feet and making her a bow, "I most humbly and with all sincerity crave your pardon."

She clapped her hands together, threw back her head, and laughed till the dimples chased all about the corners of her mouth. Her complexion, though clear and healthy, was tanned by the sun, and in parts her face was freckled, but to my mind this did not detract from her remarkable prettiness.

"Bless my soul!" said Jacob Little, his mouth closing for the first time. "What next?"

Thereat I joined in the girl's merriment, for the whole affair was ludicrous in the extreme.

"I like you," said she to me with the utmost candour. "You are very strong, but you are also very dirty."

It was now the smith's turn to laugh, and his face promptly became a mass of wrinkles, and his eyes vanished.

"Why is your hair so white?" the maid asked suddenly. "You do not look very old."

Jacob's visage, as though changed by magic, lengthened visibly, while I had perforce to hold my sides. At the same time I noted that the girl spoke slowly and with hesitation, as if at a loss in the choosing of her words. She was evidently employing a tongue none too familiar, and her accent was peculiar, but for all that had a certain attractiveness about it. She possessed a witchery of manner, a shyness mingled with a frankness of demeanour which I found very taking even thus early in our acquaintanceship. I began to forgive her the attack upon my cuticle.

Summoning to my aid the dignified yet kindly manner of my profession, I again bowed, and

"May I ask whom we have the honour of addressing?" said I. As a matter of fact, she had done most of the talking, as is the way with her sex, but it was well to be polite.

For a moment she looked puzzled, and pursed up her lips. Then a gleam of understanding came into her expressive eyes, and she nodded.

"My name is Cira," she answered simply.

"Cira," I repeated. As I live, it had a pleasant sound, though no Christian of my acquaintance went by it.

Persently, before I could continue my inquiries, she noticed that Jacob's hand was stained with blood, which was flowing freely from the wound in his arm.

"You are hurt," she cried. "Oh, my foolish spear!"

Now, considering that to all intents she had been about to stab the man as he slept, I felt annoyed at her deceit. My face, grimy though it was, must have betrayed me, for she read me at a glance.

"You think I lie," she said, stamping one little foot upon the ground.

"Well, madam," I replied very soberly, "I should be sorry to wrong you; but you cannot have forgotten the reason of my seizing you as I did."

"You use many words like Gozo," said she bluntly. "What may you mean?"

The position was awkward. I did not like to accuse her, but there was no help for it. What is more, I was not going to shuffle and quibble with this fair savage.

"As you have asked," said I, "I mean that my comrade had been a dead man by this time if I had not happened to——"

I got no farther. For a brief space she was taken with a fit of anger. Her frame shook, her eyes sparkled, her brows were knitted in a frown; and then, changing her mind, she again threw back her head and laughed merrily.

"So," said she, recovering herself, and dwelling long upon the word, "so that was why you handled me so roughly?"

"To be sure," I answered, gaining courage, "what other object could I possibly have had?"

"I thought," said she very demurely, stooping and picking up her weapon, "that perchance you could not help yourself. We have a custom in Godwana——" She stopped and then added inconsequently, "But I know little of white men, save only the king, and my father, who is dead." I confess, I was speechless with surprise. As for Jacob, he had taken off his coat, and was busy binding his arm with a strip torn from his shirt sleeve and held between his teeth.

Her gaze lit on his massive forearm.

"Why!" she cried, "you are as great a man as the other, and I had forgotten."

"Forgotten what?" I asked, still more amazed.

"The king's command. Quick!" she added, "we may not tarry, and you will aid me."

"In what manner?"

"To escape."

"Escape from whom?"

"From the first-comer, the man with the green stone."

A flood of light broke in upon me, and I turned to Jacob Little.

"Why!" cried I, "as I live, she must mean Jan Van Wyk!"

"Even so," said a deep voice, the voice of the man himself.

I started, and swung round upon my heels. Then, indeed, I cursed my folly in for a moment disregarding Corkran's injunctions. We had been taken unawares. In the very spot whence I had sprung to rescue Jacob, as I had thought, between the two rock pillars, stood the Dutchman. He had possessed himself of my loaded musket, and, as had been his custom on the *Kittiwake*, he stroked his black beard with much complacency. I further remarked that he was lean and haggard, and bore upon his livid countenance the evidence of hardships.

As I stared at him, a shrill whistle broke the silence, and as if by magic the rocks around us bristled with spear points. Full fifty naked savages appeared to rise from out the ground, fifty copper-coloured natives, with feathers set in their heads, and bearing shields as well as spears.

"They are the king's men," said Cira, and cast her weapon sullenly on the ground.

A low mocking laughter greeted her action, and then, for the first time, the smith became aware of his surroundings. He had been so busy with his wound that he had been oblivious even to my hurried sentences, and the Dutchman's curt rejoinder. Now he looked about him, blinking vigorously, and then laid hold upon his hammer.

"It seems, doctor," said he, with a look of chastened joy upon his visage, "that we are to fight."

"No, no!" cried the girl suddenly. "It is no use. See, the other white man has a gun!"

"The Dutchman!" cried Jacob, his gaze meeting that of Jan Van Wyk.

"Mine friend upon the ship," replied the latter gravely.

"I am prepared, sir, to meet you fairly, with or without weapons," said the smith, nor could he conceal the eagerness in his voice.

"I do much regret that at present I am not my own master," answered Van Wyk. "I act for the king of this place, and we were in search of the maid yonder who has defied him."

All this time, I was considering the advisability of pistolling the Dutchman as he stood, but I was averse to violence, and the odds were great. The sight of blood might rouse in the warriors of this strange place the lust of carnage, the joy of killing, and I remembered the woman. It was curious that I should do so. As a rule I was inclined to consider myself in the first place. In this instance, my second thought was of Corkran. We were in the power of these men, but he was free. A musket-shot was to be the summons for his return. I resolved that there should be no firing.

"Submit with a good grace," I whispered to Jacob, but there was little need of warning. An old man, of very small stature, with a long beard arranged in two plaits, and having a cloak of leopard-skin depending from his shoulders, came bustling into the enclosure, and at sight of him every savage raised his spear, and uttered a cry of "Gozo!" He spoke rapidly, and in a commanding voice, using a clicking language of which I was ignorant, and at once they closed in upon us on all sides. Even Jacob perceived the futility of resistance. The chief, for such I took him to be, carried a stick of yellow wood, carved into the resemblance of a snake, and as he approached the girl, he laid the same lengthwise upon his forehead, whereupon his bodyguard shouted as with one voice, "Cira!" Thereafter he conversed with her fluently and at great length, making many gestures and pointing to us and to the Dutchman. When he had made an end, the girl told us we must all three give up our arms, in which case we should come to no harm. I promptly handed over my pistols to this Gozo, who was very chary about taking them, and I had much ado to make Jacob part with his hammer—a weapon which excited the greatest interest amongst the natives, as did its owner. The Dutchman yielded up the musket, and our other belongings were speedily seized upon. Then surrounded by our guard, we were marched forth, the maid Cira going with an advance party, Jacob and myself being in the centre, and Jan Van Wyk in the rear.

In this order we began the ascent, and though as we mounted I looked abroad, I could see no sign of Corkran. This only I noticed, that the Dutchman spoke to the chief, though in what



language I knew not, and that as a result six of the warriors were left behind. Then I realised that Jan Van Wyk had seen our three loads, and rightly guessed that Captain Nicholas formed one of our company. The six men were placed in hiding to secure him on his return. Thereat I was much perturbed, fearing he would come to harm ; and yet I could not warn him in any way. I did raise a shout, but was promptly prodded violently in the back with the haft of a spear, and so deemed silence to be golden. Needless to say, my brain was very busy as we toiled up the mountain side. Who was this fair maid who spoke English, though with difficulty ? I recalled Corkran's tale of the woman who had died amongst the Caffres, of her daughter, of Cardoso and Melinda. Was this some descendent of the Portugeuse, and if so how came she to have hair the colour of gold, and the appearance of one of my countrywomen ? She had said her father was dead. Who, then, had he been ? Who was the king of this realm ? Of what tribe or nation were these copper-coloured spearmen ? How had Jan Van Wyk managed to cross the swamp, and what part was he playing in this place ? How was he able to converse with Gozo, the chief ? Above all, what had the girl Cira meant when she spoke of the king's command, and escaping from the first comer ? Such were my questionings ; and no wonder I felt confused. That Cira disliked the Dutchman was evident. She had shrunk back at sight of him,—and, this I had noticed with a certain satisfaction,—had drawn closer to me when he had appeared. Again I was in the dark as to her remark about the customs of Godwana. Verily it seemed—but there I put an end to my wandering thoughts, and took note of the features of the landscape and the way by which we climbed.

We marched on the summit of one of the huge grass-covered ridges or buttresses which looked as though they supported the lofty cliff wall, and between which grew dense tangles of white and red blossoms. My interest increased as we ascended. Our guards broke into a chant—a long swing of a song which suited our pace, and was accompanied by the rattling of their spear-handles on their dappled shields. The men were tall and finely formed, all save Gozo, and had intelligent faces, though

their features resembled those of the Caffre tribes. They were without tattoo marks, and, this I specially noticed, had no ornaments of gold, though some were adorned with bright beads sewn upon leather. Each wore a moocha, or apron of hide, and the majority had copper rings about their necks and arms. The feathers of their headdresses were white and black, and, as I found thereafter, had been plucked from the plumage of vultures. Their general aspect was warlike ; but they appeared neither cruel nor ferocious, and were under a very excellent discipline.

Higher and higher we mounted, till the grass grew sparse, till we were done with trees, till we struck a steep and winding path upon the cliff-face. The air was fresh and glorious ; the prospect, when I had opportunity of viewing it, of vast extent and surpassing loveliness ; for the mists of the swamp looked like a blue and shifting sea a thousand feet and more below us, and beyond rose the ridges we had traversed, and a multitude of high mountains upon which the sun shone. Birds of the hawk and eagle species shot out from holes and perches in the cliff-face and soared high in the air, their brown neck-feathers gleaming like a burnished bronze.

Above all things, I reflected, we were drawing ever nearer to those yellow walls we had seen, those mighty towers and ramparts which had glowed a golden hue with each succeeding sunrise and sunset.

The cliffs were of a blackish rock, which looked as though it had been crumpled from side to side into long folds. It was spotted with the dung of birds, and here and there stunted trees clung to it, some bearing brilliant scarlet flower-spikes.

Up and up, till the path narrowed, and we marched two abreast ; up and up, till we zig-zagged like a snake by reason of the windings of the road ; up and up, till we reached a projecting spur, whence I could see the edge of the cliff-wall and what was set upon it.

Then indeed my heart sank within me : the dreams of many months faded as when a sleeper wakes ; hope and desire turned to chagrin and disgust. All the time of our voyaging, all the weeks of our sore travail, all through our manifold dangers and



adventurings, I had told myself that the thought of treasure weighed little with me. I had fondly imagined that it was my roving spirit, my desire for novelties, my love of change and excitement, which had lured me on the quest and kept me stubbornly upon it. Now I knew that I had deceived myself, and that, like Corkran, I had been intent upon discovery, on the finding of this city with the walls of gold—ay, and on amassing the precious metal itself, if that were possible.

Gold, forsooth ! and golden walls ! Those towers and ramparts we had gazed upon so lovingly and so eagerly, those defences we had discussed, those yellow bulwarks upon the mountain-top, the sight of which had braced us and heartened us for a supreme effort, were now very plainly before my eyes. I looked at them, and I cried within myself, "*Quod ignotum pro magnifico est,*" and again, "*Quid non mortalia pectora cogis, auri sacra fames ?*"

I had reason for so doing—I was justified in my bitterness ; for all along the cliff-edge were piles of boulders and of weathered rocks of a fantastic shape. Towers and walls ! 'Tis true they bore some resemblance to such in their arrangement ; it may be that at one time they had been reared by human hands ; but that did not concern me. It was enough that after the greatest of vicissitudes, the most perilous of journeys, that which I had become convinced was a reality, in reality existed not.



CHAPTER XXVIII

THE KING AND CIRA

"How, then, had these mad fellows been deceived?" the reader, granted he has followed us thus far, may well ask.

I make no mystery of it, nor was the thing wonderful in itself. These confused heaps of stone and worn pillars and columns were coated thickly with a bright yellow lichen which grew upon them in patches. Each little plant was cup-shaped and curled at the edges, its under-surface being grey and wrinkled. Moreover, as I afterwards discovered, the rock was full of glittering specks, such as I had seen in slates and other stones in my own land. It was not always visible, but twice in the day, when the rays of the rising and the setting sun struck full upon the verge of the plateau, it sparkled brightly, and, further, the yellow moss was lit up so as to present a most remarkable appearance. I was to see it at close quarters, and to marvel at it, and cease to blame myself for having been led astray and having let my thoughts run riot.

At the time, however, my heart sank within me, and especially I grieved for Corkran. The old rip had been so set upon the undertaking, so full of perseverance, so triumphant when he had been able to indicate to me the spot of our ambitions, that I feared his brain would be turned by the magnitude of our misfortune. As for Jacob Little, he was so full of delight at having again met the Dutchman that he scarcely paid any attention to me when I pointed out to him how we had been befooled.

"With or without weapons," said he. "Doctor, he is bigger than ever, though a trifle lean."



I could not help smiling at his infatuation. He was as contented as a teething babe that has got its gums to work on something soft, yet firm.

His indifference shamed me, and I began to pluck up heart. After all, there might be something behind and beyond these heaps of stones.

Already we had encountered a new race, and had heard of a king. It might be, I reflected, that these were the Men of the Mines, the people of the Empire of Monomotapa. Further, there was the maid Cira. I could now and then catch a glimpse of her amongst her guards, and she excited in me a lively interest. Where had I ever seen such eyes, or watched the breeze sport with such golden tresses? Where had I ever looked upon so trim and rounded and elegant a form? Where had I ever been greeted with so merry a smile or witnessed such a coy demureness?

"Steady, my lad!" said I, recalling Corkran's sayings anent women, but for all that, resolved to do my best to aid her if she were in any danger. As was my custom, I began to weave tales anent her in my head till I had made her out a veritable fairy queen, a goddess amongst savages, instead of a little vixen who had bitten me very sorely in the ball of my right thumb.

Presently, however, my attention was again directed to our surroundings. We had reached the summit, and were about to pass under an archway. It was formed of the rude, unshapen rock from which not even the lichen patches had been scraped, and, for all I know, may have been a natural configuration. As we approached it six spearmen stepped forth and gave us greeting, crying aloud the names of "Gozo" and "Cira," whereat the old savage again laid his staff lengthwise upon his forehead. The guard of this primitive gateway ranged themselves on either side of the path, and we passed between—Jacob Little, as was ever the case, attracting their attention and exciting their surprise. It was from this point of vantage that I perceived what manner of place this was at which we had arrived, and thereby experienced a second disappointment, though one for which I was in some measure prepared. I looked upon the summit of a plateau, a great stretch of grass-covered land, more or less cup-shaped, but



The King and Cira

341

very irregular in outline. Red tracks led hither and thither to the cliff edges, which formed three sides of this oblong eminence. The fourth was a rounded crest, over which a broad road dipped. The side of this ridge faced us as we stood on the summit of the southern cliffs, and I could see it was very steep, and that at its base ran a stream, the waters of which glittered in the sunshine, while along its banks there was evidence of tillage. The broad road aforesaid, which climbed to the summit of the opposing crest, crossed the stream at a ford, and, winding upwards in our direction, reached well below us, its starting-point, to wit, a great cluster of domed huts surrounding a large central building, and flanked by what to me looked like barns with thatched roofs. The whole settlement was surrounded by a triple fence of reeds, from within which moving spear-points flashed.

Outside this main township was a scattering of hovels, huts, and booths, dotted here and there without order, but all grouped on one side of the fenced enclosure. A swarm of black figures moved about amongst them, and there was borne to us the repeated and monotonous rattlings of a drum.

The moment our guard came in sight of this kraal, for kraal it seemed to be, they raised their spears and shouted the word, "Godwana!" while Gozo, the head man, again laid the snake staff to his forehead.

"We have a custom in Godwana." I recalled the words of the girl Cira, and looked upon the place with interest, though I would fain have known precisely what that custom was.

Ere we began to descend I again looked abroad and perceived how well-nigh impregnable this site must be. To the north alone was there any possibility of its being vulnerable to attacks, as far as I could see,—to the north, where was the steep crest crossed by the broad road, for there the beetling cliffs seemed to be absent. Elsewhere the tracks ended at the edge of the plateau; there the road dipped and disappeared, clearly leading somewhere, and such a road could never be carried down a precipitous face of rock. I was curious to know what was to be seen beyond that ridge, for, being at a higher elevation, I could mark the outline of a rounded mountain-top away in the distance, and judged a



valley lay between the mountain and the plateau on which we were. Did the swamp wholly encircle this huge hummock of land? was it an island set in a morass—a stronghold for which Nature had fashioned mighty walls and a most deadly moat? This was the question I asked myself till we began to descend towards the hut cluster, and then, I must confess, that the sun made such a pretty picture of a certain figure with the advance guard that I ceased to think at all, and was content to watch the body of men and their fair captive as they traversed the narrow path which led downwards to Godwana. For all that, I noticed a multitude of cattle, red and black and spotted, feeding on the slopes; and, further, there were at intervals along the cliff edges, yes, and at set spaces on the rounded crest, little circular erections, which I found thereafter to be built of turf and stone, and to be the stations for armed sentinels. Moreover, the surface was in part sown with rocks, piled together in disarray like the ruins of little cities, and amongst them grew pulpy and spiny plants, and over them ran creepers, and between them were thickets of dark-leaved bushes.

We crossed such a stony stretch, and I remarked a great number of most gorgeous butterflies, brilliant flitting spots of colour, and likewise green lizards with swollen, scarlet necks, and merry little birds and doves which cooed melodiously.

"A strange place is this, Jacob," said I.

"And a strange people," he answered moodily, being grieved at the loss of his weapon, and finding it irksome to have his movements controlled.

It was his custom to sleep of an afternoon, and he was annoyed at having to march against his will, even though the air was cool and fresh in these lofty uplands. I understood how the maid Cira, with her thick covering of hair, could go bareheaded in the daytime.

"They have at least one pretty custom in Godwana," said I, and then took myself to task for a fool.

I perceived very clearly that I had need of Corkran as a most wholesome corrective. I began to wonder what would happen to my old comrade, when suddenly a perfect tumult arose in the



township we were now approaching. A dozen drums rattled incessantly, a score of cow-horns brayed forth the harshest of music, and there was the noise made by many spears beating upon shields of hide. At first I thought that we were the sole reason of all this uproar, but such was not the case. I looked and saw a crowd of black forms upon the broad road beyond the stream, and others flooding over the crest behind them. As they wound down the side of the ridge I noticed there was a central line, a column of four abreast, on either side of which were armed soldiery, whose weapons flashed and sparkled as they moved. I readily perceived that there were two parts of this company, and as it drew nearer I asked myself where I had seen the like before.

Slowly it moved, slowly, and, as it were, painfully; and then my memory harked back to the sea and ships—to the *Kittiwake* and the sluggish *Ogobo*—to the clearing and the barrancas—to José, the Portuguese, and that which had issued from the forest screen. The sound of a cracking whip, the cry of a woman in distress, confirmed my impressions. I was again the witness of a caravan of slaves. Now I understood the presence of these buildings like barns, the existence of this settlement amongst the mountains. Not that I fully comprehended everything; but I was satisfied on one point. Our Golden Kingdom was like to prove a very sorry affair—a place of misery and horror and revolting cruelty; and where we had hoped to discover workers in a precious metal, we had only found once more men who traded in that most perishable of commodities which is known in every English slave-ship as “Black Ivory.”

I groaned inwardly, but said nothing to Jacob Little. He would learn soon enough, and be harrowed in soul by the sights he hated. Again I cried bitterly: “Accursed thirst for gold! To what dost thou not compel human hearts?” But this time I quoted the Latin with a double meaning and a double sense of dire despondency.

We were now hurried forward by our guards, who clearly wished to arrive before the caravan, and made such haste that we were soon at the outer fence of reeds, taller than a tall man. A gateway, flanked by two lofty poles, confronted us. On the top of each of

these was set a huge elephant's tusk, so placed that its point met that of the other in mid-air, and an archway was thus formed. Here was another guard of copper-coloured spearmen, who greeted us with the usual cries, and were much excited at the appearance of white men. We passed through and found another fence. In this instance we had to hurry along between the two barriers in order to find the gateway in the second, and the same procedure was necessary between the second and the third. It was of the nature of a maze—a cunning contrivance for defence, and likely to answer well, for the palisades were one and all very high and very strongly made, and had sharp stakes set upon them, the ends of which were painted a vermilion hue. Moreover, there were holes cut in them, through which, as I found thereafter, spears with prodigiously long hafts could be thrust, like the pikes of the infantry of Europe.

All the time we thus circled the enclosure the noise of drums and horns continued, coming from that portion of this curious town beyond the walls, situated to one side of that part of the fence by which we had entered. When at last we traversed the third and last gateway we saw an interesting sight. The place was larger than I had thought, and the huts were laid out in lines with much regularity. Within the gate was an open space void of grass and beaten hard by many feet, and here a company of spearmen were exercising in a very curious manner—some crawling on the ground, others advancing in a crouching attitude, and yet others leaping and charging. At a later period I discovered this was the drill of the hunters,—for these men were not soldiers, but wholly devoted to the chase. At the time I only remarked they were black-skinned, of a different race from our guards, approaching the negro in form and feature, and had scarlet feathers as a headdress, and carried shields of red. Beyond the parade-ground were the dwellings of this singular people—domed huts of two sizes, in shape like beehives, and closely resembling those of the natives in Terra de Natal. The larger had wooden doors painted black and white; the doors of the smaller were crimson, thus corresponding to the head feathers of the soldiers and hunters respectively; for these people lived apart, and the former were held in the greater honour.

Moreover, the larger huts completely surrounded the smaller, and for this there was a reason, as will in time be seen. Now these huts were in two clusters, one division of them being on the right side of the central building I have already mentioned, and the other division on the left. On the outskirts of each cluster, and close to the third and innermost fence, were the thatched structures like barns, in reality barrancas for the slaves, being merely roofs set on poles, and having neither walls nor floors. I noticed they were empty.

My attention, however, was chiefly directed to the main building, which stood apart in the very centre, and of which I could only see the roof, for, like the kraal, it was surrounded by three fences of reeds. It was not a hut, of that I was certain, for though the roof was circular, it was not domed, and, moreover, it was pierced by windows.

By this time I had become very curious to get at the root of the mystery, though I was in a manner amused at the bewildered way in which Jacob blinked about him and scratched his white poll. In all likelihood he was, as far as realisation of his whereabouts was concerned, somewhere in the neighbourhood of Bubolongo. No wonder, therefore, he was confused. His manner was scarcely suited to an audience with a king, and so I told him.

"A king?" said he. "What next?" nor would he utter another word, good or bad.

The hunters ceased their drill to gaze at us, but stood at a respectful distance. They did not, however, give us any form of salute, and to my mind eyed the soldiers in no very friendly spirit.

Cira, the headman Gozo, and the advance guard passed through a gap in the outer barrier, and we followed them. Again an inner fence confronted us, and I speedily found the arrangement was a replica of that encircling the whole township. At last we were clear of its meshes, and before us was the palace of the king. I contrasted it with the golden mansion of my imagination, and my smile was a wry one and at my own expense. The building was circular, and enclosed a courtyard. Its lower part was of stone, unhewn, and rendered compact by a mortar of red mud. Upon this foundation was reared a house in the fashion Europeans

adopt in hot climates—a dwelling with a projecting roof formed of broad leaves, and a side like that of a native hut, save that it also was pierced for windows. An archway gave access to the plot of ground round which this curious structure was built, and, like every other entrance, was guarded by spearmen. These saluted us and cried the customary names, whereat Gozo laid the snake staff to his forehead, and we were permitted to pass, having to stoop, for the arch was low. It was indeed a mere gap in the stone foundation, the house of reeds and grass being continued over it. To my great surprise I discovered the interior to be somewhat of a flower-garden. There were flags of stone, and between them patches of mould, in which grew divers gay plants. A gallery ran round the house above the stonework, and the poles supporting it were wreathed about with pretty creepers bearing scarlet, blue, and white blossoms. It was shady, and yet ablaze with colour, and I fancied I perceived in this the handiwork of Cira.

Jacob was wholly delighted. He sniffed in the sweet scents which perfumed the air, and heaved a prodigious sigh.

"Doctor," said he, "it calls to my mind a garden in old England."

The honest fellow I could see was well-nigh moved to tears at the recollection, and indeed the place had a homely air which comforted me. Suddenly, however, every man of our guard prostrated himself and beat softly with his head upon the paving. Gozo alone remained on his feet, and he bowed himself double, and pressed the staff thrice upon his brow. There remained standing erect the maid Cira, Jacob and myself, and the Dutchman, Jan Van Wyk. Yes, and there was some one else, for a creature was standing upright, or nearly so, upon the gallery, clutching the rail thereof with both hands, and surveying us intently. For a brief space I thought it was an old baboon, but a moment later perceived it was a very aged man, so aged as to be repulsive in form and feature.

Thrice the heads of the guards struck the stone flags, and then with one accord they sprang erect, beat with their spears upon *their shields*, and cried aloud:

“M'linda !”

“M'linda !” Where had I heard a similar word? Of a sudden I remembered the cross marking the grave of Luis da Cardoso, and the tale that Corkran had told me. M'linda ! Changed though it was, spoken with a guttural click, I could not be mistaken. M'linda beyond a doubt signified Melinda, the name of the treacherous Portuguese, the surgeon of the ship *Sacramento*, who had fled to the north with the fair daughter of that English woman, a relic of the hapless S. João Baptista, who had breathed her last in the head-kraal of the Amahlubi people.

Christopher Melinda ! I recalled the full name and the whole story, and yet was it possible that this wizened, wrinkled, yellow, white-haired thing which gazed at us could be he ? There was nothing impossible in the supposition, save that the man must be very old—ay, close upon a hundred years, and yet he looked it. He looked it, I say, all but his eyes—as black and keen and sparkling a pair of orbs as even those of my comrade Corkran. They were extraordinarily bright, although upon the whites of them were blebs of yellow fat, from which coarsed tiny blood-vessels, forming a network as it were. In marked contrast to them were the shaggy, snowy eyebrows, which drooped above them ; the puckered forehead ; the receding, sunken face with high cheek-bones ; the thin, transparent ears ; and the projecting lower jaw, wasted at the angles. Below it the skin bagged like a pelican's pouch, and the ridges of the neck stood out like the stays of a ship's mast, tense and sloping. Again I scanned the visage. I noted the thin grey fluff on the vault ; the tortuous vessels at either temple ; the myriad crows' feet at each eye angle ; the coarse nose, pitted at the point ; the lean, colourless lips working incessantly ; the pointed chin, bristly with a dirty hair-growth. The body of the man was so much in the shade that his manner of dress was concealed from me ; but I remarked his fingers, all knuckles and scaly skin and discoloured nails clutching the rail as a bird's claws fasten on a perch.

This was a king ! The desire to laugh, to halloo with merri-ment, came forcibly upon me, but I restrained myself. There was that in the man's eyes which made me do so—a look of



power, of cunning, of insight into others, of—I know not what, but something which gave me pause.

Was he in any way related to the girl *Cira*? I asked myself, and fervently hoped that such was not the case, for I liked not the look of this king in *Godwana*, and doubted the nature of the thin and chilly blood which coursed sluggishly through his twisted and thickened vessels. I remembered that he had struck down his countryman *Cardoso*, that *Corkran* regarded him as a scoundrel,—and *Corkran* was none too particular in the judging of his fellow men. So this was the gallant whom the fair maid had preferred, who had been worsted in the contest for her hand, and yet had won her in the long run. It was in very truth hard to conceive, at least until he straightened himself, and moved by the aid of a staff into a patch of sunlight. Then I saw he must at one time have been a very tall man—yes, and in all probability a handsome one, for his spare and stooping frame was broad, his long lean legs were straight, his body without deformity. His dress was that of a European of the time of the first *Charles* in England; but a cloak made of leopard skin hung over his doublet, and he wore no ruff, as indeed must be evident from my description of his neck and muscles. Neither had he any collar of lace, nor any ornament beyond a plain ring of gold on the forefinger of his left hand. As I have said, he moved into a new position and again viewed us, coughing at intervals like a dog with a bone in its throat. There was something impressive in the silence and something irksome in the set regard; but it gave one time to think, and my thoughts were those I have recorded. I have no conception of what occupied *Jacob's* mind, but opine it was a blank, to judge from his countenance. The Dutchman stroked his beard and spat once solemnly and deliberately upon the stone flag on which he stood. Both actions seemed characteristic of the man.

“*Gozo!*” said the king presently in a voice of surprising strength, “hambake, *Gozo*, hambake!”

The word evidently signified approach, for the head-man *stepped forward*, raised his staff, and then awaited the king's

pleasure. The latter spoke to him in the language of the copper-coloured people, and with a thick, throaty utterance, leaning over the rail as he did so. Gozo answered at great length, pointing to Cira and to us and to Jan Van Wyk, and evidently recounting our capture. Our weapons were brought forth and handed up to the king, who clutched each with a grunt of satisfaction; and he was specially charmed with my barkers, as well he might be, their butts being inlaid with silver and mother-of-pearl, and their locks of a pattern he could never have known.

Suddenly he issued an order. A spearman stepped forward and held one hand high above his head. Before I could guess what he would be at, the old villain had levelled one of my pistols, fired, and sent a ball clean through the man's palm, who received his wound without wincing, and then retired, to all appearance envied by his fellows.

I confess I began to feel anxious as to my own skin after this display of markmanship—or, rather, of brutality. It was plain also that these people were acquainted with firearms, for they betrayed no astonishment at the flash in the pan, the curl of smoke, and the loud report.

When the king had made an end of questioning Gozo, the maid Cira was set before him, and he spoke to her in the same tongue. From the tone of his voice I could tell that he was upbraiding her, and at times exceeding angry. The vessels upon his temples stood out like twisted cords, and his hands shook even as they grasped the rail. The girl listened with bowed head, and she of all that company alone seemed in keeping with the bright flowers and the sweet scents which filled the courtyard. He appeared to question her, for suddenly she looked up and answered him, and there was a fine spirit in her voice. A murmur ran through the lines of spearmen—a murmur of sympathy, or I was greatly mistaken. She seemed heartened thereby, and presently there was a perfect war of words between the two. The old king pointed to Jan Van Wyk and spoke vehemently. The girl shook her head till her bright hair spread in disorder all about her shoulders. So the

scene continued, to me more or less unintelligible, though even then, aided by Cira's words ere we were captured, I had my suspicions.

All at once Melinda waved his arms impatiently, as though dismissing the subject, and began speaking in another tongue—a language without clicks, and which I surmised to be Portuguese, both from my knowledge of the man's history and my acquaintance with the Latin. Further, I noticed a look of understanding creep into the Dutchman's hairy visage. Jan Van Wyk was master of the speech of Portugal as well as that of England. The object of this sudden change was speedily apparent. Cira was to act as interpreter between us and the king, who, no doubt, wished to keep the information thus obtained from the soldiers. It annoyed me to think the Dutchman could not also be kept in ignorance, for the man was crafty, and, by his own showing, unscrupulous; otherwise what of the green stone he had torn from Corkran's beard, and the lies wherewith he had fed the crew of the galiot at Bubolongo? Great was my desire to learn how he had compassed the crossing of the swamp.

"Canst speak French?" I asked the maid in that tongue, for I had some small knowledge of it.

She shook her head and looked at me with parted lips.

"I know not these words in the English," said she.

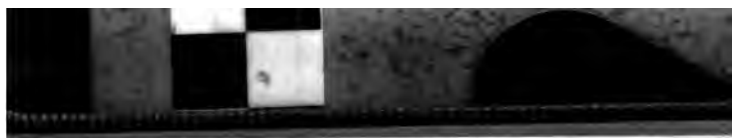
"Nay!" I cried, "I did but try you in another language, for there is need of care."

"Even so," said Jan Van Wyk, as he had once said before; and, looking at him, I perceived a mocking laughter in his eyes, although the rest of his face was motionless, and his hands still sought his beard.

"The king would know who you are, whence you come, and for what reason you travel?"

"Tell the king," said I, "that we are gentlemen of England, myself a surgeon, my comrade a worker in metals; that we were cast away in a vessel of our country, and journeyed inland, having a desire to see new things."

She did so, and Melinda was taken with a fit of horrid merriment, which ended in a series of barking coughs.



The King and Cira

351

"What says the king?" I asked.

"He says ye shall assuredly see new things," replied Cira, and her face was grave.

"Tell the king," said I, "we have already done so, but that this Dutchman is no new thing to us. We succoured him in times past, and he robbed us thereafter."

A mischievous sparkle came into the girl's eyes, and she made haste to translate my words. Scarce was she done, however, when Jan Van Wyk spoke in the Portuguese, and the king again chuckled till he choked, and addressed the maid.

"The king would know which of you was robbed?" she asked.

Now I was in a dilemma, for I had no wish to say anything which might endanger Corkran; but as the Dutchman had already discerned signs of his presence in our company, I considered it inadvisable to withhold the truth.

"The third of us," said I, "he whom the six spearmen await."

"And what is he?" came the question.

"A sea-farer," I answered; and, impelled by a pride I could not stifle, I added, "and a man hard to beat."

"Yet will I beat him," was the king's reply by the mouth of the maid Cira.

"Your task will not be of the lightest," was my unspoken thought, and little guessed how near the mark it was to prove.

Melinda took snuff in the Caffre fashion, the grains clinging to the hairs of his nostrils, and for a time there was silence.

Then the interrogation again began.

"The king would know how you crossed the swamp and died not, nor were stricken with the fever?"

"Tell the king 'twas by the knowledge I have gained," I answered, for I was not willing to betray the secret of the Arabian.

I could have sworn there was a look of admiration in the girl's eyes as she turned to address the hoary villain. If she had a love of learning, so much the better. The old man spoke sharply to her in reply, and she shook her head. Presently, however, she again faced us, and, speaking sulkily, told us that the king regarded me as a liar.



"Tell the king I am not a liar—I am a physician," I rejoined hotly.

When this had been translated to him, Melinda doubled up with mirth, and I am free to confess his response amused me also in some measure.

"The king says a physician and a liar are one and the same thing," was what Cira announced as his finding.

"In some cases it is so," I replied; "the king knoweth his own heart."

My shaft found a lodgment. The eyes of the old Portuguese lit up and grew suspicious, and his lips quivered. He spoke harshly, and the girl's face grew troubled and she trembled a little. Presently they conversed together, and Cira seemed to me to be pleading on our behalf.

"We are in peril, Jacob," I whispered; and, deaf though he was, he heard me.

"I am ready," he replied softly, and I saw him brace his shoulders and look about him.

"What says the king?" I asked, determined to know the worst.

My answer came from an unexpected quarter.

"The king says you are to die ere nightfall, and that your comrade, he of the white hair and the blind eyes, will now speak for himself," said the impassive voice of the great Dutchman.

"Why am I to die? I have done no wrong," I answered stoutly.

"It is the king's will," said Jan Van Wyk, and again his eyes smiled the while he stroked his beard.

The girl with her back to us threw out her arms with a gesture of appeal, and I blessed her in my heart. The aged villain upon the gallery craned his head towards her, and said something which sent the red blood mounting to her neck and face; and as she turned towards us I saw it mantling on her forehead.

Once again Jan Van Wyk spat upon the stone flag at his feet.

Suddenly an inspiration came to me. The Melinda of Corkran's tale had been a surgeon, and must have known the Latin. I would put the king to the test, and scare him with my

knowledge of his past, were he indeed the scoundrel of the seaman's yarn.

I raised my arm and pointed a finger at him.

"Christopher Melinda!" I cried in the ancient and classic tongue,—*"Christopher Melinda, sometime surgeon of the ship Sacramento, what of Luis da Cardoso and the white woman who dwelt with the Amahlubi people?"*

I was scarce prepared for the effect my words had upon him. His jaw dropped, his eyes started from his head, he shook all over and clapped a hand upon his brow. He made as though to speak, and then gave vent to a curious cry, which was almost a scream. Froth burst forth upon his lips, one side of his face twitched violently, and then he fell backwards, thudding heavily upon the wood, and lay there quivering and foaming at the mouth in the unconsciousness of a violent fit.



CHAPTER XXIX

THE SLAYING OF THE SIX

LET not the indulgent reader imagine that the above events occurred precisely as narrated. For one thing, the maid *Cira* was scarce so fluent in her English as here recorded. Every now and then she found herself at a loss for a word, and, indeed, made not a few errors, the which, however, sounded rather taking than otherwise. Again, more was said than I have set down; but, for all that, I have faithfully narrated the chief questions put to me and my answers thereto, and likewise the effect of my last words on the man who had once been surgeon to the *Sacramento*. It was scarce less remarkable on his spearmen. They drew away from me in surprise and fear, while even the Dutchman showed signs of astonishment—yes, and of annoyance. *Cira* uttered a cry of distress, and, mounting a flight of wooden steps which gave access to the gallery, she ran hastily along it till she was by the old man's side.

Poor maid! he was, as I thereafter found, her sole relative on earth, and, despite his faults, had been kind and indulgent to her. No wonder, therefore, she was concerned at his condition. Still, she did not weep and wail, as is the way with her sex, nor did she turn and curse me. Instead, she went and brought water in a calabash, and dashed it on *Melinda's* face, and wiped the froth from his lips, and tended him with a care pleasant to witness. She might be a little vixen, an untutored dweller in the wilderness; but there was a woman's heart in her bosom, and she had a woman's deft way with her fingers and a woman's inconsistency

and readiness to forgive, for but a moment before she had been very wroth with the object of her solicitude. I am free to confess I felt some compunction for my act, though I had never intended to bring about such a catastrophe.

"Wonderful, doctor!" said Jacob, as he slowly perceived what had happened. "You are as clever a man as Corkran in your own way; but you have spoiled the fight."

"And saved your beauty, Jacob," I answered. "They would have been too many for us. But, like you, I am inclined to ask, What next?"

I answered the question myself by going to the assistance of the girl, who was too scared to be angry, and told me the king was subject to such attacks, though she had never seen him so convulsed.

There was nothing to be done but to let him have air, loosen his clothes, though they hung lightly on him, and see he did not bite his venomous old tongue. I took the opportunity, however, of recovering my pistols, unseen by any save Cira, and she made no effort to prevent me.

Presently his spasms left him, his eye-wink returned at the finger-touch, and he slowly got back his senses, though he remained dazed and dull.

"Tell them the king will live," said I; "that for this time I have spared him."

She did so, and the result was scarcely what I had anticipated. Gozo straightway plucked up heart to assume the direction of affairs, and the soldiers under his command promptly seized upon Jacob and the Dutchman, holding spear-points to their throats. I feared the smith would rebel, and shouted to him to remain passive, for very little would have precipitated a slaughter. The natives, I could see, were roused, and a frightened animal with some power yet left him is the most dangerous of all. Though my pistols were concealed in my dress, and one of them was loaded, I made no resistance, when, with a certain degree of timidity, they made me also a prisoner.

Gozo said something to the girl, who seemed dazed and

stunned, as was no wonder ; and we were led forth and through the fences. As we emerged upon the open space, there was driven into it the caravan of slaves. I saw nothing more of them, for we were each bestowed in a hut, although by signs I begged that Jacob and I might be lodged together.

It was close on nightfall, and despite the excitements through which I had passed, I was worn and weary. Water and a mess of ground meal was given me ; a double guard was placed at the door ; but too exhausted to eat or think, I drank my fill, and, stretching myself upon the bare earth, I presently fell fast asleep.

I was wakened by the wooden door being drawn aside, and the entry of the bright light of another day and one of my guards, who placed food before me, in the shape of flesh and cakes made from a species of millet, together with a calabash containing a beer, brewed, as I found thereafter, from the same cereal. All day I remained in durance vile, for two armed sentries squatted on their hams without the hut, and I had no way, even had I desired, of cutting through its thickly woven and mud-plastered walls. A tiny hole in the summit of the dome formed the customary egress for the smoke of a fire, but the meat given me—goat's flesh, or I was much mistaken—was already cooked, and I was denied the doubtful luxury of cheerful flames and glowing wood. Doubtful, I say, for these huts become full of pungent vapours, and are stifling to those unaccustomed to dwell in them.

The hours passed wearily, and I am not minded to trouble my good reader with my vain imaginings. Let him place himself in my position, and he can picture my ideas regarding Corkran and Jacob Little, the Dutchman and the king, and, to some extent, perchance, with reference also to the fair maid of this outlandish place, this kingdom of a copper-coloured folk, ruled over by an exiled and aged Portuguese.

I lay idly, and heard the clamour of the slaves and sounds whereby I judged some of them were being beaten. The air which came filtering in to me was extraordinarily sweet and pure, and I fancied this mountain region must be healthy in the extreme. All grew very still in the heat of the day ; but towards



The Slaying of the Six

357

evening, and after I had been served with another meal, there arose a great clamour and the noise of people in lamentation. What first arrested my attention was the distant sound of singing—a long, wailing chant, which grew louder as those who sang it approached nearer. A drum rattled, a cowhorn brayed discordantly, and then a multitude of cries came drifting in to me—cries of grief and anger; and again the dreary song, rising and falling in long-drawn, measured cadence, exceeding mournful and melancholy.

“What had happened?” I asked myself; and then it was borne in upon me that the king must have died.

I crawled to the door, and looked out. My guards thrust me back with the handles of their spears, but not before I had seen the head of a procession entering through the inner gate in the third fence. Two men led the way—two spearmen—and on the shoulder of each rested a man’s legs. I saw the bare and yellow soles of his upturned feet facing me in the distance ere I was driven back, and realised that they were carrying that which, in all probability, was a corpse. Still, I was far from realising what had happened, but I heard the sound of many men moving hither and thither, and my guards were doubled.

The tiny circle of sky visible through the roof of my prison darkened to a deep bluish-black, and a bright star twinkled in its midst, and seemed to wink at me in a friendly fashion, as though to say:

“Courage, Doctor Harry! I can see what to you is invisible, and things are none so bad.”

I nodded up to the cheerful little fellow, and then forgot his presence, for there were voices speaking at the door. Presently the heavy block of wood was withdrawn, and some one entered bearing a lighted torch. For a moment I could not discern who my visitor was; but the figure rose, the torch also was raised, and to my surprise and wonderment I beheld Cira, the king’s ward. Her hair was coiled in heavy masses about her shapely head, and wreathed with strings of bead-work; her dress was of some dark-coloured stuff, which rendered her figure slender and even more graceful in aspect, and a curiously woven girdle with fringed and



tasselled ends encircled her waist. The light from the smoking torch fell full on her face, so that her dark eyes shone like twin stars, and she resembled some fair spirit from another clime.

"Give you greeting," she said in a low voice. "See, I have brought you better food!"

She held out a pot full of some conserve, that proved to be honey, and had also with her a few sweet cakes, which I afterwards highly approved, for they were both toothsome and palatable.

I made haste to rise, though when on my feet I had to stoop somewhat, for the hut was low in the roof save at its very centre. I bowed, therefore, and, in a manner, continued bowing, saying at the same time:

"Believe me, I am highly honoured, and you have my grateful thanks."

The girl laughed a trifle nervously, and motioned me to be seated, at the same time taking up her place on a mat of woven reeds which lay upon the floor. She thrust the torch into a convenient hole in the ground, and then put her hands to her hair, so that the admirable symmetry of her arms was visible. I wondered whether she did this thing on purpose or unconsciously. To this day I do not know.

"Why have I come to see you?" she asked.

"That," said I, "you know best yourself; but I esteem it a privilege."

"I wish," she replied, a trifle petulantly, "you would speak the English that I can understand."

I was profuse in my apologies.

"You have so great a knowledge of the language that I am apt to forget you do not know it perfectly," I answered.

"I thought," she said, "that you were, how say you it? Ah! a plain-speaking man, but you are as full of windy words as Gozo."

I confess I was a little taken aback.

"Your pardon," I rejoined; "but it is not customary in England to speak familiarly to a stranger, more especially if *that stranger* be a woman."

"Yet I have known you for two days," said she; "and did you not—but there——"

She paused, yet I was for once inquisitive.

"You refer to our first meeting? Tell me, what is that custom in Godwana of which you spoke."

"Shall I?" said she doubtfully.

"If you will," I replied.

"Well," she continued, "you must know that when the men of Godwana take women to wife there is a ceremony whereat the women are placed in a line with their backs towards those who, who——"

"Want them," said I simply, and yet vastly amused at her frankness.

She nodded gravely.

"Then," she added, "each man must make his choice and struggle for the mastery; and the woman may set her teeth in his hand, but he who, despite the pain, prevails——"

She hesitated.

"Prevai-leth," said I, nodding in turn, and half choked with laughter, though sorry for the maid's sweet innocence.

"Is there such a custom in England?" she asked, carelessly toying with the tassels of her girdle and looking downwards.

"I have not heard of it," I answered, my voice trembling as I smothered my mirth, the while I wondered if this woman were an accomplished coquette or was merely the artless and unabashed creature she appeared to be.

Suddenly she leaned forward.

"Ah!" she cried, "you mock me, you laugh at me. I should not have said this; and yet how was I to know. My father is long since dead, and, and——"

Her lips twitched, she was in sore distress. This flower of the desert had a tender spirit, it would appear, and I had done wrong to doubt her.

"Stay;" said I, "I do not laugh," which was true enough, whatever I had been doing. "No," I added earnestly, "tell me more; tell me all there is to tell. I am your friend,

Cira, your friend, and, for all I know, your countryman. Tell me what brought you here?"

With an effort she controlled herself, though I fancied she swallowed a sob in her throat. I saw she could not herself find utterance, so I resolved to question her delicately and kindly. She needed careful handling, this child of the wilderness.

"In the first place, who are you?" I asked gently.

She looked up with lashes on which tear-drops trembled, but which she bravely winked away—a touching sight, I willingly allow.

"I am the second daughter of the king," she replied, with the faintest suspicion of conscious pride.

"The daughter of Melinda!" I cried in surprise, and she signed to me to lower my voice. "The daughter of Melinda,—but your father is dead?"

"The second daughter," she repeated, with a puzzled air.

"So," said I, "I understand; the old king is your grandfather. In England you would be called his grand-daughter."

"I am very foolish," she replied. "I did not know."

"Poor lass!" said I, voicing my thoughts. "How could you, living amongst these savages? But tell me, who was your father?"

"He was a man of England," she answered, "who fled to Godwana because, because——"

Again she was at a loss.

"His life was in danger?" I hazarded.

She nodded.

"From black men?" I queried.

She shook her head.

"Ah! from the Portuguese, the yellow traders, the king's nation," I ejaculated, recalling Corkran's tales of the Bay de la Goa, and the settlement thereat.

"It is true," she said; "you are quick."

"Pooh!" said I. "The thing was obvious—plain," I hastened to add, for she made an impatient gesture. She had an active and ready brain, this maid, and hated being hampered by her lack of words and phrases.

"And then——" I hinted.

"The man, my father, was wedded to the king's daughter, whose mother was dead.

"Dead!" I exclaimed. So the pearl of the Amahluhi people, their goddess, the source of so much contention, and the ruin of Cardoso, had perished in the wilds.

"Yes," she answered; "the king was ill and like to die, so that he was glad to wed my mother to one of her own colour, for she was very fair, and—and——"

"Moreover," said I.

"Moreover," she repeated vaguely.

"I mean," I explained, "that he would require a successor—a king to rule after him. Was it not so?"

Her face dimpled with pleasure.

"It is good to speak to you," she said; "it is even as when my father lived."

It was on the tip of my tongue to ask her if she had loved this father of hers, but I had the grace to refrain. I was not rogue enough to trifle with this pretty maid, nor would I take an undue advantage of the peculiar situation.

"And your mother?" I asked, after a brief pause.

"I never saw her."

"Died when you were born?" said I, with the instinct of my profession.

Again she nodded, and I could read admiration in her eyes. It was certainly not on account of my person, for I was exceeding dirty, and my beard was a tangled mass.

"Come, Doctor Harry," said I to myself, "you are a lucky fellow, whatever may befall. First in the field is foremost in the race."

To be sure I was not thinking of the future, and yet my thoughts showed the trend of my mind even thus early. I was surprised and displeased with myself, but resolved to put a guard on my tongue and on my actions.

"What was your father's name?" I asked, with the gravity of a Court adviser.

"His name? I know not," she responded. "I ever called him father."

Here was a strange thing; this lass was ignorant of her surname.

"And why were you called Cira?" I queried.

"Cira! It is the name of the people of Godwana for the time of harvest," said she: "I was born at that season."

"And befit your name," thought I, looking at her critically.

So Cira meant autumn. I gazed at her, and in the gleam from the torch saw her bright hair, the colour of golden sheaves or ripened maize, the scarlet beadwork like crimson berries, her rosy lips the hue of ripened fruit, her sun-tanned face with its soft freckling, her lissom figure with its full and rounded outlines, her little sandalled feet peeping coyly from beneath the folds of her purple robes. Assuredly she was well named after the season of her birth.

"Cira," said I; "'tis a pretty name."

"Do you think so?" she asked eagerly.

"Otherwise I had not said so," I answered quietly. "But tell me, Cira, why was your father in danger from the Portuguese?"

"The priests," was her unexpected answer.

"Whew!" I whistled. "So that was the trouble—a Protestant, belike, and in danger as a heretic."

"Tell me," she cried, leaning forward; "I do not understand."

"My dear lass," said I in truly fatherly tones, "Heaven forbid I should enter into the mysteries of sects and religions!"

"Religion!" said she. "Ah, yes! I remember now; I have a book—a writing."

"A Bible?"

She clapped her hands softly.

"But I cannot read," she added sorrowfully.

"In that you are in no way peculiar," I made haste to assure her, and I think she understood.

"Never mind, I shall teach you one of these days."

"To read?" she asked breathlessly. "To read the English?"

"Ay, and the Dutch, if you will," I answered thoughtlessly.

"No!" she cried vehemently. "I hate the Dutch—at least, I mean, the Dutchman."

I was astonished at her fierceness.

"We are coming to him," said I, resolved not to lose the



The Slaying of the Six

363

slender thread of this narrative. "Tell me first how your father died."

"In the valley," she said, pointing towards the back of the hut, and, therefore, to the north. "With the hunters in the valley."

"So!" I replied. "Poor lass!" and gave her time to recover, for I saw she was moved at the recollection.

"It is many moons ago," said she, "and I saw no white men till he came with the green stone," and she made the funniest of grimaces.

"But," said I, "how did he cross the swamp?"

"By the secret path and by the aid of the stone."

"The stone!" I muttered.

"The people of the stone showed him the way."

"Ho, ho!" I cried softly, "but came not with him?"

"Nay, they fear us greatly, for we slew them once with a great slaughter, and since then they abide in the south."

I was hugely interested in this account. So the bauble had been of an unexpected service to Jan Van Wyk, and there was a passage—no doubt a short one—through the morass. I began to perceive what had happened, and longed I could see our friend Corkran and tell him the tale.

"Listen," I said suddenly; "the Dutchman came, and the king—he whom they call M'linda——"

She laughed and nodded at my pronouncing of the word.

"The king," I continued, "being old and frail, did as he had once done before: he issued a command—he made a decree."

She listened with round eyes of astonishment, and cherry lips between which I could see the white teeth, to whose sharpness I was able to testify.

"He said," I went on, "that a certain Cira, his second daughter" (I put it in this way to humour her), "should wed this great and bearded man, who had come up unharmed from the swamp."

"It is true," she murmured.

"Now this man was willing, but the maid Cira was not—why, I cannot tell."

"And how am I to say?" she asked pitifully. "He, he——"

"Was rough, rude, cruel?" I hazarded.

She shook her head.

"No," said she simply ; " he was not like you."

I confess I was abashed, but she merely laughed merrily at my evident discomfiture.

" Oh, yes," she added ; " I know you thought I would slay the other man, even as he slept."

I perceived the chance of paying her a delicate compliment, but refrained.

" What of the Dutchman ? " I queried hurriedly.

" I was never asked yea or nay," said she.

Then I understood. It was the old tale. This maid had a pride and a will of her own, and was not at the disposal of any patron, even though he were king in Godwana. I liked her the better for it.

" So you fled ? "

She nodded.

" I was going to the cavern—the hole in the cliffs," said she, " when I found the other great man asleep."

" And his comrade rough, rude, and cruel ? "

" Even so," she retorted, all smiles and merriment. " I learned these words from the Dutchman," she added, very proud of her accomplishment.

" I fear I cannot recommend him as an instructor," I replied. " I mean," I explained, " he would not be a good teacher."

" No," said she, " I think you would be better."

" You do me too much honour," I responded, hugely tickled.

" Will you help me ? " she asked suddenly.

" Assuredly."

" Against the Dutchman ? "

" Even against Jan Van Wyk ; though," I added, doubtful of my prowess in that particular, " I would the third of us were here."

" The third ? " said she. " You mean the man in the cave ? Ah, it was of him I came to speak."

" The man in the cave ! " I replied, somewhat bewildered.

" Yes," she cried, and there was fear in her voice ; " the slayer of the six."

" Of the six ? " I exclaimed, and like a flash I remembered the



The Slaying of the Six

365

wailing and lamentation, the head of the procession, and the upturned soles of what I had taken to be a dead man.

I sprang to my feet.

"Do you tell me," I cried, "that those six spearmen who were left behind are dead?"

"They have been slain," she said quietly, "and by one man."

"By Corkran!" I shouted. "I wager 'twas by Corkran!"

"Hush!" she cried, with a gesture of dismay, as there came a dull thud from without the hut, and—"Even so!" said a deep voice from beyond the door.

The wooden block was hastily withdrawn, and on his hands and knees there came creeping through the aperture the vast bulk of the Dutchman, Jan Van Wyk.



CHAPTER XXX

FOR LIFE ITSELF

I HAVE said on hands and knees; but, to be correct in my description, I had better have said on hand and knees, for one arm of the Dutchman was stretched out behind him, and it was apparent that he was dragging something after him. His sudden appearance astonished me, nor could I guess at the reason of his coming, though I felt it boded me no good. I stood rooted to the spot and stared at him, while Cira sprang away from the mat, and crouched at the back of the hut, leaving her little gifts behind her, the cakes of millet and the pot of honey.

Believe me or not as you will, the humorous notion took me that we were like two schoolchildren surprised by the master at an unlawful feast. Yet there was nothing humorous in the aspect of Jan Van Wyk, nor in that he drew into the hut behind him, for the latter was a dead man, the corpse of a copper-coloured spearman. Was the Dutchman mad? I asked myself. He did not look so; his features were as composed as ever, and yet his actions were passing strange. He left his burden on the floor and disappeared through the hole. There was not a word spoken in the hut. I was as if turned to stone, struck dumb with horror and the approach of some great peril. Once again the hairy visage of the man was visible, and he crawled in, as before, without a sound; and, as before, he dragged after him the body of a native. Four times did this thing happen—four times, as I am a truthful scribe; and neither Cira nor I stirred hand

or foot, nor was our breathing to be heard. We were like palsied folk ; but ever we watched the opening, no matter whether it was free or blocked by the massive form of the Dutchman and the limp figure of one of his hapless victims. His victims, I say, and with truth. Ere he had done, I understood the significance of this grim and gruesome sight. Jan Van Wyk had slain my guard. But why? But why? my brain questioned dully, and again asked, Why does he bring them here? What is his purpose? What villainy is this?

I was soon to know.

When he had placed the fourth beside the first, the second, and the third, he coolly drew the block before the opening, and made it fast with cord of hide and staple of wood, and then, never looking in our direction, he began to arrange his dead. Two he propped up against one side of the hut and two against the other. The former pair sat huddled, and the head of each fell over upon his shoulder in a loose, uncertain way. My knowledge of the anatomy told me what was the matter with those silent spearmen. Their necks were broken. The other pair had each been bleeding at the nose, yet I could see on them no marks of violence. I recalled, however, the sound which had been the occasion of Cira's warning cry, and it was even such a sound as might be made by two stout skulls driven together with the force of fighting rams. I confess I was afraid—chilled and terrified as much by the thought of the immediate future as by the present and the immediate past ; but, I can honestly admit, more on the girl's account than on mine own.

Having finished to his satisfaction, the Dutchman straightened himself as far as the roof would allow, rubbed his broad palms together, and then passed one hand down his beard, which rustled softly in his grasp, for the hairs composing it were thick and coarse.

"Will you not then continue your conversation?" he queried in the English.

We answered him nothing.

"Almachtig!" said he in his deep voice, "we are as silent as these our visitors," and he waved a hand first towards one side of the hut and then towards the other.

By the light of the torch he loomed enormous, even though bowed in the back, and his face was in the shadow, in the gloom which hid the roof. For very shame I plucked up heart.

"What want you?" I asked. "What is the meaning of this, and of those?"

"Of this and of those?" he repeated. "'Tis well put, of this and of those; there is no such good phrase in the Dutch."

The absence of any excitement about him was alarming. His impassiveness increased my dread; but I began to grow angry at the same time.

"Good manners seem also to be lacking in that nation," said I.

"And courage in the other," he retorted.

"I think not," I answered as calmly as might be.

"I venture to think otherwise," was his reply.

"What want you?" I asked again, and for the first time could tell that Cira was present. I heard her breathing, short, sharp, and quick, behind me.

"I wish," said he, "to say a few words, and then to do a little thing—quite a little thing, which will make no difference to any one but you."

I guessed his meaning, but the light in my eyes must have been ugly as I answered :

"Say on, Meinheer Jan Van Wyk."

"To-morrow," he continued, "very early in the morning, the king sends me to fetch, dead or alive, the man who was kapitein of the ship which found me."

"The king!" I cried. "Is he recovered?"

"Yes, yes," said the girl's voice, "it is true."

"Now you will believe me," sneered Jan Van Wyk. "This man——" he continued.

"The man you robbed——" I interposed.

"And who stole my chart?" he asked, with the first sign of fierceness he had shown, "who stole it as I lay senseless?"

"I took it," said I, "and I restored it to its owner."

"After you had ruined it," said he,—"found its secret, and spoiled it."

"You mistake my intentions at that time," I answered shortly ;
"but no matter."

"My friend," said the Dutchman solemnly, "you will not mistake mine at this time—niet, niet ; but that also is no matter."

"I must frustrate these same," was my unspoken thought ; but how ? that was the question, and one on which my life depended.

"I will find this man and bring him in alive," said Van Wyk, "he must die six deaths—one for each of the king's soldiers he has slain."

"You are a trifle out in your calculations," said I, "and do not consider the future."

"Some," said he, "will have no future to consider."

"That," I replied, "is what I strove to impress on you."

"Verdoemen !" he growled, "but you are a brave man, after all."

"Nay," said I, "but a desperate one, Meinheer Jan Van Wyk."

"It is the same thing," he remarked quietly.

"It may be," I assented ; "in any case, you lied a few minutes since."

"It is true," said he, "though then you were afraid."

I was silent ; but all the time I watched his eyes—those steady grey eyes which recalled to my mind those of Janssen the Jager.

He began to speak again almost dreamily—and indeed the whole interview was to me more like a dream than a very stern reality.

"I said I must do the king's bidding, for the sake of a certain Obed Schryner who was my very good friend. Ah, yes, you start ! Had I known that the kapitein was alive when I came upon him in the island, I would have killed him then and there. As it is, to-morrow—to-morrow ! Firstly, however, I said that I must go and see the woman whom the king had promised me, to whom I gave the green stone as a token, who was to be my wife."

"We have a saying," I remarked, "that green stones are unlucky."

"For those that lose them, yes," he said.

"But for those who find them, no," I replied, displaying the bauble itself in the palm of my hand, into which it had just been thrust by slender, trembling fingers.

"The torch burns low," muttered Jan Van Wyk meaningly, stroking his beard, while I racked my brains to think of some way of escape, and forgot the easiest.

"I sought her," he went on, "and I found her not where she should have been."

His voice began to tremble and vibrate, and his eyes glowed with a sullen fire, but for the nonce he mastered himself.

"I have come weary miles and suffered much to find gold," he added; "and all has proved a lie. But I have not come for nothing, I am to take that which was offered me—the woman, the king's ward, yet when I seek her I find her by night in the hut of a dog of an Englishman. I find her his——"

"Stop!" I thundered, and then, moved in some strange way to pity and admiration, I added bluntly:

"You are too brave a man, Meinheer, to sully your tongue with false slanders."

"Do you tell me so?" he asked.

I inclined my head.

"I will believe you," he said; "I will believe that you spoke the truth before you died. Yes, I am grieved, but you must die. The other—the big man—may live; but you have brains, and the girl thinks you will save her from me."

"And is correct in her supposition," I replied boldly; for a little hand had sought my arm. God knows! I had no basis for my rash speech.

"I think not," said Jan Van Wyk. "I have killed these very quietly, for it is stupid to make much noise, and I shall kill you also without a sound more than that."

He snapped his thumb and forefinger, and I realised he meant to imitate the click my neck should presently give, and felt a sick feeling begin to steal over me, when a voice whispered in my ear:

"Quick! What did you take from the king?"

"The pistols! The pistols!" The thought hummed in my head even while I blessed the maid for her timely reminder.



"It is I who think not!" I cried briskly, even joyfully; and, pushing the bauble into my fob, I whipped forth one of my barkers.

Jan Van Wyk gave never a sign of fear.

"'Tis unloaded," said he. "The king himself fired it."

"Yet will it serve," I answered, and seizing it by the middle, I threw back my arm and hurled it full in his face. As I did so I dragged its fellow from my belt and cocked it hastily. There was not a moment to lose. I heard the girl scream; I heard a thud, a hoarse shout of pain and rage, and then the giant sprang at me. In a second I pitched up my weapon and pulled the trigger. The lock snapped, the powder fluffed and flared, but there was no report; my pistol had failed me. Ere I could make another movement my face was buried in Van Wyk's beard and his arms were about my back. I dropped the barker and sought to seize him by the throat, but I might as well have grappled with a bear. I was a strong man, strong and stoutly built, but this huge Dutchman was endowed with a power more than human. For a brief space I withstood him, my legs wide apart, my back braced, every muscle tense, my teeth set, my neck strained against him, my fingers clawing at him to find a purchase. He grunted in his throat and pressed me to him. I strove desperately to resist, but slowly I yielded. My spine bent, and, leaning over me, he put his weight upon my chest. My muscles gave, I was forced downwards and backwards, yet I fought him stubbornly till there came a sharp pain in the small of my back, and I knew that there, and not in the neck, my vertebræ would break asunder. Every moment was precious to me, and there was but one way to prolong my life. I shuffled my feet forward till my balance was gone and my spine was straightening. His suffocating grasp was loosened in some measure, and as he sought to tighten on me again he staggered forwards with me.

"Verdoemen!" I heard him growl savagely, and then we fell together, the Dutchman on top, myself beneath, tearing and worrying at him. I got a hold upon his beard and wrenched fiercely at it. He bellowed in pain. Again I tugged, and he withdrew his hands from behind my back and seized my arms and



twisted my fingers till he was free. Then, with my throat in his grasp, he seized upon my head, and I realised my hour had come.

Where Cira was I knew not. I was without hope, but I remember that the torch went out, and I remember also that before doing so it flickered into a brighter flame, by the light of which I saw with eyes which were starting from my skull as it was being forced sideways, I saw, I say, the two dead men whose necks had been broken sitting huddled against the hut wall; and it seemed to me that they raised their limp and drooping heads and nodded once to me as if in greeting. Thereafter there was darkness, and a feeble, hopeless striving to turn, so that one might catch a glimpse of the twinkling star which had peeped kindly at me through the roof. Every sinew on one side of my neck was tense and stiff and straining, yet each stretched slowly, very slowly, but none the less surely. "Shall I hear the snap which announces my dissolution?" was the strange thought which crept into my mind, and while I resisted desperately and with a cold sweat upon my face, I listened for the dread sound and waited for the final agony. There was no dulling of my brain, no merciful unconsciousness. I was in full possession of my faculties, and thus at length I did hear a sound, but happily not that one which I had expected. We had fallen sideways, and thus as my head was forced round it faced the entrance to the hut, and the night being clear I could see, after the torch was extinguished, a patch of sky, studded with a few stars. Suddenly this was blotted out, and then there came a noise of rending and tearing which mingled with the rush and hum of blood in my ears. Dark though it was I could tell what was happening, for I was looking from deep blackness to comparative light.

I became aware that something or somebody discarding the door was forcing a way through the hut wall. I saw the latter crack and break above the opening, cave in and crumble and collapse. A great stretch of clear, dark sky was visible, and against it the outline of a huge man, who in desperate haste had burst through hardened mud and wattles and closely bound reeds and wisps of dried grass. A moment I saw the spread of his mighty shoulders, and then he stooped and sprang at us.

I knew him, and while I could not speak, not even gasp, my brain voiced the word "Jacob!" I longed to cry out, to give him an inkling of where we were, and then, so curious a thing is the mind, I recalled the fact that the smith was an albino, that he could see clearly in the dark, though half blind in the light of day. Truly my wandering ideas anent him long ago by the forge at Bishop-Solingford had now been justified. I had imagined how this peculiarity might aid him. I had never thought that it might also aid me, aid me in dire extremity.

It has taken long to write, but these notions had been born and had ended in the time it took Jacob Little to fling himself upon the Dutchman. Then, indeed, there was a battle of giants.

Jan Van Wyk made a desperate effort to finish me as he realised he had a new foe with whom to cope, but summoning all my remaining energies I withstood him till his grasp sensibly relaxed, till that horrid tension on one side of my neck was in some measure eased. The Dutchman was for the moment in the grasp of some one stronger than himself. Nor had he only a single adversary. He gave me an inch and I took an ell. All fear of him was gone, and I was full of anger and resentment, ay, and full of fight. I wriggled myself free and fastened as before upon his beard. Then, indeed, my would-be murderer was in a sorry plight. Jacob had him somewhere by the nape of the neck and the forehead, and was wrenching him backwards, and I was clinging to his chin-growth with one hand and driving a fist into his side. He struck at me, but missed me in the dark. He struck backwards at Jacob, and his arm was promptly seized by the smith.

Have you ever, good reader, seen a trio of dogs battling in a confused mass, tearing and rending at each other, insensible of injury, blind with fury, deaf to their surroundings? So was it with the three of us, and soon we were rolling over and over on the floor of the hut, against the walls of which were propped four dead men, who sat motionless and huddled, two of them with heads which drooped like those of flowers, the stems of which are broken. I admit there was a glory in it, a hot, fierce,

unholy joy, and especially when I began to feel we were gaining the mastery.

"Leave him to me!" I heard Jacob cry, but I was not to be denied, and stuck to Van Wyk as a burr sticks to a hairy hide, clung to him and worried at him till there arose a great clamour and shouting, till strong arms fastened on me and strong fingers loosened my grasp, till we were forcibly separated by a dozen spearmen, who came crowding in through the gap made by Jacob, whom, as I was to find, the girl Cira, despairing of my life, had summoned to succour me; who had scattered his own guards, and who, I am free to confess, it took six stout men to drag from off the body of the Dutchman. To this day, I doubt not, they tell the tale in Godwana, unless, indeed, its fame has been dwarfed by that of a greater contest, of which I presently must tell.

Curious to relate, despite the intensity of our endeavours, not one of us had sustained serious hurt. I was stiff and bruised in the neck, and sore also in the hip, for I had rolled over the useless pistol, which had exploded without doing damage, but beyond these trifling injuries I was unharmed. Jacob had been struck on the eye, and the skin about it was already puffy, but that was a mere trifle. Van Wyk was the worst of us, but his most serious wound had been inflicted by the pistol I had flung at him, which had laid open his cheek, and was the occasion of our being bespattered with his blood. True, his beard was torn, and I warrant he had a few lumps upon him here and there, but it is no easy matter to cripple a man of his calibre, and so he was able to stand and walk when the spearmen had vanquished us.

Torches were brought, and each of us, breathing hard and with our clothes torn, was held fast like a hound in leash. For a moment I had no thought of the maid who had saved me. No gentler feeling quelled the lust of fight which was yet upon me; but presently I saw her, pale and trembling, yet with a great light in her eyes and one hand at her breast. A moment so, and then Gozo, who had brought the spearmen on us, said something to her and she smiled, a very wan smile by way of



For Life Itself

375

assent, and not without reason ; for, as she told me later, the head-man had sworn by the king and by the two plaits of his beard that these white men were warriors indeed.

For all that he dealt with us speedily and effectively. We were then and there bound with thongs of hide, nor could we resist, for spear blades were at our throats. The girl made no protest, and we were led forth and again bestowed each in a separate hut, but this time two armed natives shared my prison, and I do not doubt but that Jacob and the Dutchman were similarly guarded.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE RIVALS

I COULD not sleep, and had time to reflect on the surprising series of events which had befallen me. It was apparent that the girl Cira, in the whimsical and impulsive way common to her sex, had constituted me her protector. Why she had done so passed my understanding. At no time had I a taking manner with women, save indeed in my capacity as a leech; and, though I had not got a decent view of my face for many a long day, I opine that my appearance had not improved, while my clothes were of the sorriest, and my person not over clean. Undoubtedly since the days of her father I was the first ordinary white man she had met. Melinda was not white, he was yellow, and, moreover, he was her grandfather; Jan Van Wyk was a shaggy giant; Jacob, with his white hair and his blistered face, his huge loose-jointed body and his genial blink, presented an aspect sufficiently peculiar.

I was forced to the conclusion that this pretty maid had taken a sudden fancy to me solely because I realised her standard of the average European. It was alike a remarkable and embarrassing situation. Still, she was a fair lass, this ward of the king, with something decidedly taking in her manner. There were no tricks of fashion, no frills and fripperies about her. She wore her heart upon her sleeve, or rather on her white and rounded arm; and I was convinced it was a kindly, simple, and trusting heart, which a man would do ill to harm. Not that I then and there surrendered that freedom which Corkran had so



much commended. Nay, verily, I am of a cautious disposition, and my mind is to some extent logical ; hence I was merely amused at the turn events had taken, though even then attracted by the maid's face and form, and her touching confidence in myself.

I meditated, therefore, on the strangeness of her story, on her lack of a surname, on the unpleasant fact that she had some of the old king's blood in her, and wished I had learned more about this territory of Godwana, about its trade in slaves, its manner of worship, and the two races who accepted the sway of the Portuguese, Christopher Melinda.

Then my thoughts veered round to the Dutchman, and I had the grace to put up a prayer of thankfulness at my happy deliverance from his violence. I began to perceive what manner of man he was ; that, like Jacob, he gloried in his strength ; and that he apparently despised any other weapons than those with which Nature had endowed him.

"Let not the strong man glory in his strength." I recalled the words of the scribe, and yet felt thankful that I was myself gifted with a fair measure of that commodity, otherwise, instead of being merely stiff-necked, I had been as the two whose heads drooped upon their shoulders. He was jealous of me, this Dutchman, and was clearly a ruthless, overbearing man, however brave and determined. I accorded him a mead of admiration, for he had courage and a certain grim impassiveness which suited well his mighty frame and the level tones of his deep voice. There was none of Jacob's blundering eagerness about him in moments of excitement, and from that fact alone he was a more dangerous assailant than the smith. He lacked humanity, this Jan Van Wyk ; he was cool and cold-blooded, and would let nothing stand in his way. Moreover, he had gained the ear of the king, probably because he could speak Portuguese ; and, thanks to his theft, had been the first of those visitors who had already sorely disturbed the peace of this savage realm. And none more so than Corkran, that most amazing of men. It seemed he had single-handed sent to their deaths those six copper-coloured soldiers, whom I had last seen squatting in the space amongst the stones far down on the mountain's flank. I



had been worried concerning him, I had feared for his safety, and this was the message he had sent me. No doubt it was hard upon the spearmen; but I lay and laughed to myself at this fresh evidence of my old comrade's prowess, and vowed I had never met, and would never meet, the match of Corkran the Coxswain, or, as he would have insisted, Captain Nicholas Corkran of the Americas.

At that time I thought also very kindly of Jacob, of his timely aid, his anxiety on my behalf, and his keen desire to have the Dutchman entirely to himself. What though his absent-mindedness, his simplicity, his dullness of intellect rendered him occasionally an irritating companion? There was that in the great smith which made him a very lovable mortal, and my description of him has been indeed a poor one if that be not apparent in this, my narrative.

Very naturally my imaginings wandered from him to her who had brought him to my rescue, and it was with a confused remembrance of my interview with her and a very clear vision of her undoubted beauty, that I at length found the rest I so much required.

I was roused by one of my new guards, who brought me a meal, including some of Cira's sweet cakes of millet seed, and by the entrance of a visitor, no other than Gozo. The head-man looked much perturbed, but, after seeing me unbound, courteously waited till I had finished eating, and, understanding my signs and rightly interpreting my wishes, sent forth a spearman, who presently returned with a calabash of clear water, so that I enjoyed the luxury of a wash; albeit, I had not the wherewithal to dry myself. Thereafter, he caused the thongs to be again fastened on my wrists, and, dismissing my guard, made me a long oration, of which I understood no word save "Cira," the which was oft repeated with much vehemence.

I surveyed this old savage critically as he spoke volubly and took snuff at intervals from a little spoon of wood, which it was his custom to carry thrust through a slit in one of his wide and pendulous ear-lobes. His crisped poll was grizzled and there were grey hairs in his beard plaits, his forehead was high and wrinkled, his eyes mud-coloured, his nose flat, his lips protuberant



and his skin greasy. For all that he had an intelligent face, stamped with a look of worldly-wisdom and an air of command.

"A crafty old fox," said I to myself; "though Heaven knows what he wants."

One thing he did require was a sufficiency of clothes; for a stout and elderly gentleman when more or less unclad is not a seemly spectacle, even if he be a native of Africa and have a copper-coloured as well as a shrunken hide.

He finished at last and nodded thrice, till the vulture's feathers set in his head-dress of tallow shook, and the snuff grains dropped from his nostrils.

It was imperative that I should keep on good terms with a person of such importance, and consequently I made him a long speech in return, at which he seemed highly gratified. Thereafter he had the sense to go and bring me an interpreter in the shape of Cira herself. I managed to rise, even though my arms were bound behind my back; but at the sight the girl waxed indignant, and, after an argument with Gozo, succeeded in getting my bonds removed, for which I thanked her with great heartiness. She was again garbed in white, with the belt of scarlet beadwork encircling her waist; but her hair was gathered in coils about her head, so that one could mark the excellent shape of her neck and the graceful poise of her head thereupon.

"You are not hurt?" she asked.

"Not a whit," I replied, "thanks to you."

"Nay," she said softly; "thanks to your friend—he with the white hair and the blind eyes. Ah! but he is a man!"

"Yes," said I, a trifle sourly; "he is better able to aid you than I am."

She flashed a quick glance at me.

"I did not say so," she answered simply.

"Nevertheless, 'tis true; had it depended wholly on me, the Dutchman might have wreaked his will on you."

"For whom you would have died!" said the maid.

"Unwillingly," I remarked, for there was no honesty in posing as a hero; but I am afraid that Cira misunderstood me, for her face changed and her manner grew distant.



As yet I did not know my own mind, and hailed these signs with some satisfaction, dolt that I was.

Gozo had been all impatience during our brief converse, and now he urged the maid to explain the reason of his visit. She did so, somewhat listlessly, and yet the news was of the greatest importance.

It seemed that there had long existed a feud between the spearmen and the hunters. The copper-coloured folk had been the original tenants of the plateau—a brave and warlike people, over whom Melinda and the daughter of the Englishwoman had gained ascendancy owing to an ancient prophecy. It was the Portuguese who had devised and started the slave trade. He saw the spot was healthy, unlike its surroundings, and he knew that he might make his terms with his countrymen at the Bay de la Goa, whence ships plied to Madagascar, Arabia, and the Cape itself. He concealed his own identity, and settled down to a savage life, training his spearmen to make raids and forays, and drilling them as he had seen the soldiers of Spain drilled. They took kindly to their new career, and his position was confirmed; for he became a petty tyrant, punishing cowardice with death, and making life of small account. Whoever turned his back on the foe had short shrift on his return, and consequently the troops of Melinda overcame all the neighbouring tribes, and every year went farther afield and gathered fresh spoils and fresh glory. Caravan after caravan marched to the coast, and though many died from fever, there was always a sufficiency of survivors to be handed over to the Europeans in return for cloth and food-stuffs, for beads, and for all manner of merchandise. No doubt the Portuguese wondered who this potentate in the interior might be. Indeed, several set out to discover, but they were slain secretly by order of Melinda, who, I fancy, was a little mad—as witness his fits—and was content to lord it unchallenged in the wilderness.

A single white man flying from persecution won his way through, and sought and found the king's mercy and the king's daughter, as hath been told. Ere this, Melinda had established the corps of hunters from a very stout and fierce people, who had given him much trouble, and who lived in the north. These men



loved the chase, and the wily old king perceived that he might gratify them and benefit himself by adding ivory and other trophies to his slaves ; consequently the hunters formed part of the settlement, were admitted to the great kraal within the triple fence, and found their occupation in the wide valley to the north, through which coursed a clear river, and which teemed with all manner of game.

On hearing this I was of opinion that Melinda had provided against contingencies. Fearing that one of the head-men amongst the copper-coloured might usurp his place and power, he had encouraged this black race and played off the one against the other, carefully retaining the balance between them, so that the soldiers were ever the stronger party, and yet not too strong.

As I listened to the long tale told with some difficulty and diffidence, I conceived an admiration for this old rogue, who was as astute as a diplomatist, and surely, I thought, as rich as Croesus. There I was wrong, for I learned that his whole store of treasures and the hut containing them had been destroyed by fire, so that he was busy amassing fresh wealth. If not a kingdom of gold, this Godwana was like to hold its equivalent, and yet, as I reflected sadly, its wealth was the price of the lives of men.

I asked who were the people who lived outside the township, and learned these were fragments of various tribes whom the king had from time to time spared, and that there also lived all the women in special huts. Strange to relate, and yet in some measure touching, was the fact that since his wife died Melinda had remained in solitary state, and had neither taken a partner of his joys and sorrows, nor established a harem of dusky beauties. The inferior folk did the humble work—the tillage, the cattle-tending, the drawing of water, and other menial offices, and were, as Gozo said, of little account and very filthy in their habits.

Such then, in brief, was the history of this strange place, but the reason of Gozo's visit was the fact that there was trouble brewing. It appeared that the last batch of slaves brought in—the caravan I had seen descending the northern slope, came from a tribe that was an offshoot of the great tribe to which the hunters had belonged, and which Melinda had long since broken up and

dispersed. Thus there had been hot fighting, and the soldiers had lost heavily. Further, the hunters had seen the six dead bodies of the men slain by Corkran, and the four corpses which were the work of Jan Van Wyk. They knew the king was old and ailing, and believed these wonderful white men who had come amongst them were hostile to their rivals. Hence they were ripe for revolt. Gozo had discovered a plot to release the slaves, and murder himself and the spearmen. Further, a rumour, as will in time be seen, had spread amongst them, and even amongst the soldiers, which precipitated affairs, and more than anything else led to the disturbance. Matters were, indeed, serious, for the king, whom they had kept ignorant of the Dutchman's doings, had sent him forth with a large force to kill or capture Corkran, and thus the garrison was weakened.

Moreover, many soldiers were in the outposts upon the edge of the cliff and on the ridge, and these Gozo had not so far dared to recall, lest by so doing he might precipitate the rising. True, he spoke with contempt of the hunters, he spat on the ground as he named them; but I could see he was in mortal fear of them, and thus he had turned to us in his extremity. Would Jacob and I cast in our lot with the soldiers? was what he asked. To be sure, he delicately hinted that if we did not do so he would be forced to cut our throats, but I thought it well to discard the consideration of this alternative, and through Cira I asked him if the soldiers represented the king.

"Yea and verily," was his answer.

"And," said I to the girl, "does the king represent Cira?"

"Both soldiers and hunters are my friends," answered the maid, who was sore distressed; "for my father was the leader of the black men, and they loved him."

"But," said I, "if it is a question of supremacy, whom would you have supreme?"

"It is the soldiers who must win," said she; "but even now I go to try to make peace."

"Then," said I, "tell Gozo, the head-man, that we fight for the king, for," I added, lowering my voice, "by so doing we also fight for Cira."



She heard me coldly, being still displeased, and made no answer.

Exchanging a few sentences with Gozo, she stooped and left the hut, but as she did so, I heard the rattle of a drum and an incessant braying of cowhorns.

"Hoity-toity," thought I; "she is touchy, like all her sex, and yet I merely spoke the truth on both occasions."

I had not time to think further, however, for she reappeared, entering hastily, and spoke rapidly to Gozo. Then she turned to me.

"There is trouble with the slaves," she said; "and I cannot go, for they know me not."

She was interrupted by shouts and cries.

"Quick!" said she; "we must set free your friend, and you must be armed. Yet is it sad and I hate this war and this place, and I hate you—and—and——"

She stamped her little foot.

"Yourself for doing so?" I hazarded, amused at her outburst, though she looked admirable when in a temper.

She flushed hotly, and I smiled, the which made her very wroth with me, as I could tell. She was not able to trust her voice, and the pupils of her eyes dilated; but Gozo fortunately intervened and hurried us outside the hut. It was at the back of the outer circle, being a spearman's dwelling, and was not far from one of the great sheds, where some sort of struggle was proceeding, for I could see the flash of steel and hear cries of pain. At the next hut we liberated Jacob, who had considerable difficulty in passing through the door, but greeted me with the most sincere pleasure.

"You are going to have your fight after all, Jacob," I shouted.

"With the Dutchman?" he asked eagerly, saluting Cira in a very clumsy fashion.

"No," said I; "friend Corkran will see to him; but there is a revolt against the king."

"He is a villain," said the smith bluntly; "I will not help him."

"But you will aid this fair lady, Jacob?"

"I will aid you, Doctor Harry," said he; "I care nothing for

maids and less for kings; but give me the hammer, and I am at your beck and call!"

"Art a worthy fellow, old comrade," said I; "and you will have your fill of it; but we have need of haste."

It was true, for the sound of a tumult reached us from the outer palisades, and Gozo tugged doubtfully at his beard-plaits and growled viciously.

"He says a body of the hunters have returned from the valley, and that he must summon the outposts," said Cira; "but come, I will get your musket and the strange weapon."

We entered through the fences, and immediately thereafter the deep sonorous roaring of a gong filled the air.

"It is sounded only in time of war, or when one dies in the house of the king," said Cira. "Why is the world so cruel, and why must men slay each other?"

Her face was pained and her eyes troubled. Poor lass! Others more privileged than she had asked the same question and gone unsatisfied.

Again the war-gong was beat, its separate notes blending and quickening to a roar which died away in a series of metallic clangs.

I could picture the sentinels springing to their feet and seizing their weapons. Now I understood why the huts with black and white doors surrounded those whose doors were red. The pity was that the ranks of the soldiers were much depleted, and a third of the outer hut ring untenanted.

Ere we reached the gap in the wall of the king's house Gozo rejoined us, and Cira explained that it was his desire we should at first take no part in the battle, if battle there was, but should remain to defend the palace. Thereby, it seemed, Gozo trusted to surprise the enemy should they gain an early advantage; further, knowing that our assistance might be of the utmost value, he did not wish us to be killed or maimed in the open. I am free to confess his arguments did him credit, albeit there was something cowardly in lurking behind walls and palisades while the soldiers encountered the hunters in the open space.

As for the king, he was too feeble to play any important part.



The Rivals

385

Indeed, much of the veneration in which he was held was due to the fact that few, save those of the bodyguard, had seen him. He lived the life of a hermit, and thereby acquired a mighty reputation. Again did the Latin proverb fit the case,—“*quod ignotum pro magnifico est.*”

We hurried into the courtyard, but Melinda was not visible, being still abed, and unconscious of the danger which threatened him.

It was Cira who brought us our weapons, and it was a sight to see how Jacob clutched the handle of his cherished hammer and heaved it aloft with a huge sigh of satisfaction, and swung it about his head. The girl gazed at him with eyes full of wonder and admiration, nor did I grudge the smith this tribute of praise. I was glad to get my musket and a supply of powder and shot, while my missing pistol was also restored to me, though it was useless, for my smaller bullets were at an end. Thus armed, both Jacob and I felt our confidence return. I inquired if there were other firelocks; but it seemed that Melinda forbade their import into Godwana, the which was scarce necessary as the Portuguese at the Bay de la Goa refused to trade in munition of war, fearing, no doubt, to be, as one might say, “hoist with their own petard.”

For all that, the soldiers, as I have said before, were familiar with firearms, for every warrior in his youth had journeyed to the coast with the caravans of slaves. Cira led us into the house, which was furnished with some pretensions to comfort, and, ascending an inner stair, we gained a small loft, from which a window opened on the roof and commanded an extensive prospect. We looked out on to the southern slopes, and likewise to east and west; we saw the gathering of hovels where lived the women and the menials, we had a view of the open space within the triple fence. From the various lodges of the sentinels, and especially that which we had passed after our capture, men were hurrying towards the great kraal. The sun struck upon their glittering spear-points, and on their shields of black and white. Yet were they still far off, and showed as tiny travelling figures, running with the ease and grace of the native savage. Again the gong bellowed and clanged, and they seemed to stoop and

quicken their pace as they realised the urgency of the summons. There was need. The hut cluster without the triple fence was swarming with an excited mob, amongst which moved men with red shields and red plumes.

"See!" said Cira; "the hunters give them spears."

It was true, the very menials were siding against us, though the women of the place stood apart in two separate bodies, and kept up a constant lamentation, throwing dust upon their heads, and beating their breasts. These, as Cira told us, were respectively the wives of the hunters and the soldiers. They seemed to me tall and well built, with their hair dressed in the Caffre fashion, so that it stood back from the head like a stiff horn, being clubbed with tallow.

At that moment a woman joined us, Cira's body servant, who had been her nurse, an old and toothless hag, with the mumbling jaw of age, but with shrewd and kindly eyes, and, I was thankful to note, a sufficiency of clothing. Maquita she was named, and that she doted on her charge was evident. Cira spoke kindly to her, and the old woman shook her head, and assumed such an aspect of woe and distress that I was moved to sympathy. It seemed she had two sons in the ranks of the soldiers, and that one of them was with the Dutchman. For him, indeed, she did well to be anxious; as for the other, time alone would show, but so far there was no bloodshed. Yet Gozo was busy marshalling his men, forming them in a double line, while already he had the stabbers, as they were called, placed between the palisades which surrounded the palace.

The trouble was that half the hunters were already in the open space, and it was doubtful if the guard could hold the outer fences. The position was indeed peculiar. Farthest away were Gozo's reinforcements, speeding to his aid, then came the hunters, newly returned from the valley, and others who had been beyond the kraal. With these were also the menials whom they had stirred to revolt, but who probably counted for little, being accustomed to wielding the hoe and the cattle-stick rather than the spear. At the outer gate, and lurking at the loop-holes in the great and triple barrier, were the soldiers, or the guard of Gozo as



The Rivals

387

they were called. They also held the inner gate of these defences, and faced a great body of the hunters, who had left their huts and gathered in the open space. These had enemies on either side, for Gozo and the king's guard held the approaches to the main building, whence we were spectators of the whole scene.

Now, lest this description be not plain to the reader, I have got one, cunning in the art of drawing, to compass a plan of the place, so that any with common sense and a perception of things may perceive what manner of kraal was this of Godwana, and what was the disposition of these rival factions on the eve of the great fight.

I have said the hunters had enemies on either side, but this disadvantage was more than counterbalanced by their superior numbers, and by the fact that they were even then liberating the slaves in both barrancas. Gozo could not spare men to restrain them, for his little force was fully employed in surrounding the inner fences, though most of it was massed in front, as is indeed delineated most excellently in red and black by my most worthy of artists.



CHAPTER XXXII

WE FIGHT FOR THE KING

By reason of this curious division of forces, it befell that the contest began beyond the confines of the township, and for a time was limited thereto, those within the great fence hesitating to join battle till they could see who would gain the day without, and whether or no the guard of Gozo, the head-man, would prove equal to their task. The height of the palisades would prevent them from witnessing what occurred, and thus we alone were in a position to mark how the day fared, and with which side rested victory. Still, let it be noted, that we could not see the stabbers crouching at the outer and triple ring, though the open ground beyond was plain to our view, and thus we were spectators of the first meeting of the dappled shields and those which were red.

Onwards sped the sentinels, swift as flying buck, and the foremost party of them, three in number, drew near, and made for the great gate. Suddenly they found their way barred by some twenty of the hunters, who shook their spears at them, and then, crouching low, went through the evolutions of their curious drill. The three copper-coloured, tall and lean men, stood irresolute, and watched their display. Their wisest course would have been to tarry till they were joined by the other sentinels; but, as I was to learn, they were a proud-stomached race in battle, these soldiers of Godwana, and presently, calling to each other, they moved forward. The hunters at once began to close in, so as to obstruct their passage, and, seeing this, the dauntless



We Fight for the King

389

three made ready for the charge. In a moment their wide shields covered them from eyes to knees, each right hand grasped a small throwing-spear, and, shoulder to shoulder, they rushed downhill upon the hunters.

I watched them breathlessly. A shower of light hunting-javelins, used in the pursuit of buck and buffalo, met them full in the face ; but they were not to be denied. They cast their assegais in return, and one of the black men fell flat upon his face and lay still.

Then a roar of "Cira !" went up from them, and at the sound the girl started.

"These be men of my company !" she cried, "and call my name." She leaned forth, with eyes fixed upon them. "Ah ! will they live ?—will they live ?" she asked eagerly.

"Heaven grant it !" said I. "But they are brave rather than wise, and the odds are heavy."

Though they were far from us, we clearly heard the shock of their impact as they burst upon the foe, and—for they were taller men than the hunters—we marked the vultures' feathers rising above the press. Spear-blades flashed in the sun, and the red plumes darted hither and thither ; but so stout-hearted were these warriors of the corps of sentinels that it looked as though they would break through. The lie of the ground favoured them, and so the mass of men surged down the slope, and still the black-and-white towered above the scarlet, though the broad stabbing blades no longer shone as they were raised aloft.

Nearer and nearer whirled the fighting company, and left behind them on the grass those who were stretched motionless and those who sat helplessly, leaning heavily on one arm, and with heads drooping in the death-sickness. I looked, and every one of these was a hunter ; and some, I doubted not, were ruddy as their shields.

All at once the whole fierce fight was swallowed up by a fold in the ground, and we could see nothing of the combatants, nor did any sound of conflict reach us.

"Cira," said I, "'tis not fitting you should witness this slaughter."

Indeed, the maid was shaking like an aspen, and her cheeks were lily-white. She shook her head.

"Let be," she answered in a low, strained voice. "I must see whether or no they escape the death. Are they not men of my company?"

We watched together, even Jacob staring eagerly abroad, though he could see nothing of the fight, and had never done so. The minutes passed, and then a figure sprang upon the rise nearest us and flourished his weapon aloft.

"Alas!" said I; "the three have joined a greater company than yours." For this man who had come up out of the pit of slaughter bore crimson feathers on his head and was of the colour and stature of the hunters.

At my words the poor lass broke down utterly, being, indeed, tender-hearted and unnerved by all that had come into her life these past few days. By signs I got the old woman, Maquita, to lead her away, though she would not quit the room, and was vexed with herself, albeit her grief was but evidence of the womanliness of her heart.

"These three were indeed men," said I to Jacob; and with good reason, for whereas full twenty of the hunters had gone into the fray, there were but six who joined that solitary figure whose appearance had signalled to us which way the fight had gone.

Scarce was one conflict at an end when another began, for the sentinels, seeing the fate of the fighting trio, massed together, and made a determined effort to reach the gate. A fresh body of hunters, along with many of the broken tribes, encountered them, outnumbered them, and ere long wholly surrounded them. The guard of Gozo was unable to render them help, for, as we judged from cries and shouts raised in the rear, an effort was being made to scale the outermost of the palisades, and the stabbers were busy repelling the invaders.

Hitherto the battle had been waged in comparative silence, save for the wailing of the women and the single battle-cry of the three who lay dead in the hollow. Now, however, fierce passions were let loose, and fierce yells rang out, while the hunters in the

open space began to taunt Gozo and his men of the king's guard, and fling curses at them, together with mud and stones.

There was no response, and the conduct of the little savage with the leopard's skin and the plaited beard was indeed admirable. He moved up and down in front of his double line of braves, and did not so much as look upon the evil rabble, which, despite its numbers, yet feared to attack him till they knew how matters fared beyond the barricades.

Suddenly he stopped, and, looking up, called out to us. I summoned Cira; and he repeated his question—for question it was.

"He asks who is gaining the victory," she said.

"So far the soldiers do well," I answered. "They are pressing forward, and keep together. Tell him it is hopeful."

She did so, and he nodded gravely, while every man of his company waited in an expectant attitude and hearkened to the sounds of strife which filled the air. I had spoken the truth, but it was not long ere things took a turn for the worse. The seven who had survived regained their breath, and, being of high spirit and no doubt drunk with the lust of battle, they rushed downwards and hurled themselves into the *mêlée*. In vain the sentinels plied their spears, in vain they shouted their rallying cry, in vain they strove to reach the gate. One after another the plumes of black and white sank to rise no more, but still the remnant clubbed together in a compact mass, and still they beat back the lithe and eager hunters who sprang at them with a valour well-nigh the equal of their own.

For the moment I forgot all that depended on the issue of the struggle and was merely a spectator, horrified, it is true, but yet interested in the extreme. I believe I shouted to encourage the soldiers—I have no doubt I plied them with advice; but I remember nothing of it save that the sweat ran down my face as though I myself were one of the combatants.

It was a fair day, bright and still, and great hawks soared aloft far off above the southern cliff edge. A gorgeous yellow butterfly, with a blue bordering to its wings, came and lit on the warm thatch of the roof near me, and a bird like a wagtail perched on

one of the inner palisades and chirruped cheerfully the while he bobbed and flicked his feathers. I saw both bird and insect, and could scarce believe that men were battling for dear life a hundred yards away.

"Can we not go and help?" said Jacob. "If these men are as you say, 'twere a pity they should perish."

"No, no!" I answered. "Old Gozo is wise, and our turn will come."

I thought of the maid, and for the first time fear crept into my heart. She might be friendly with the hunters, but would they spare her if they triumphed? Would black savages, mad with fury, hold their hands in the hour of victory? The thought chilled me, and the reality of it all came home to me and set my nerves quivering, proved, tried, and hardened though they were. No wonder, for in a brief space every man of the sentinels was down, though each had taken heavy toll of his adversaries.

An exultant shout went up from the hunters, and was answered by their comrades within the outer palisades.

"How goes it, my son?" Again Gozo put the question, and again Cira answered him.

"Yet will we wait, my wolves and I," he answered. "Is Kulolo ready with the fire-maker?"

Now Kulolo was the name he had bestowed on me, and signified "he who struck from a distance."

Cira replied in the affirmative, for my musket was loaded and I had chipped the flint.

"And Sabe-Sabaka? What of Sabaka?" he called up softly, meaning the white white one, or the great white man, as Jacob had been named.

"He hath his strange weapon, and, though he sees not, yet his heart is stout," was the maid's reply, according to herself.

"It is well," said Gozo, and spoke to the king's guard, along whose lines there ran a murmur of satisfaction.

Very musical was the speech of Godwana, despite its click and the frequency of the letter "k" therein. It was otherwise with the tongue spoken by the hunters, which was harsh and barbarous,



We Fight for the King

393

and never more so than, when drunk with slaughter, they charged the keepers of the outer gate.

Loud rose the battle cry of "Gozo" as his guard met them face to face, and I could see the little man was proud of hearing it, and that, more than ever, his strut resembled that of the fighting gamecock.

Terrible was the struggle beneath the tusks of the elephant, yet it was but little we could see from the roof, for the men were sheltered from our view by the lofty fences. It needed not a sight of the combatants, however, to impress us with the grimness of the stand made by the guard of Gozo. That was evidenced by the shrill yelling of excited blacks, by the screams and sobs of wounded men, by the sound of blows, by the loud repeated shouting of the watchword.

All the time the women wailed amongst their huts ; all the time the stabbers were busy in the rear, though few strove to scale the defences in that quarter. Indeed, so narrow was the space between each palisade, and so high were they, that few could spring up and seize and mount upon them. Once, indeed, I saw a red plume rise above the second fence, and beheld a black and agile savage fling his legs across it ; but next moment there was a flash, and a throwing spear passed clean through him. The lean blade stood out behind his back, and the drops gathered and dripped from its lower edge, the while the long and slender haft vibrated to and fro as though still speeding through the air. The man loosed his grasp upon his spear, started convulsively, and then doubled up and fell head downwards ; but the hollow of his knees clung to the summit of the barricade, and there he hung, plume downwards, and there I found him hanging when the fight was done. Done, I say ; but it was only then beginning, as I knew when some half-dozen of the copper-coloured, together with the guard of the inner gate, suddenly broke out from the inner fence, and darted through the ranks of the hunters and the liberated slaves. They were mad with terror, and stabbed wildly at the foe as they passed. Foam was on their lips, their eyes were wide open and staring, and their spears red to the handle-butts ; their plumes were shorn, their shields gashed and ruddy as their crimson hands.

The old woman drew Cira away from the window, and the lass went willingly, being sick at heart, though she gave no sign of fear. It was as well she did not see what happened, for, weak though Gozo's forces were, he did not hesitate. As the beaten soldiers of his guard reached the lines he gave an order, and raised his staff with the snake carved upon it. There and then his men sprang upon the vanquished, who, poor fools ! might as well have died with their faces and not their backs to the pursuing enemy.

Stern indeed was the discipline of Melinda the King.

"Doctor Harry—Doctor Harry !" I heard Jacob cry, and knew that at last he saw what was happening.

"Steady, my lad !" I answered. "'Tis for our lives. See, it has had its effect. They know now the temper of the king's guard."

It was true. The eager mob which had chased the hapless spearmen broke into the space and mingled with their fellows and the slaves ; but for a brief space they paused irresolute as they saw what Gozo had done and realised what manner of men were those who ringed about the palace of the king.

The old chief looked up.

"Kulolo !" said he, and I understood it was time for me to play my part in the fray.

I knelt and trained my musket on a black hide, and then I understood that strange pleasure in war which is the joy of the soldier. I had shot the beasts of the field—ay, even the lordly buffalo, and once the lion himself ; but though I was for the nonce safe from attack, and could take my own time and pick my own quarry, never did I thrill as I did then. It is one thing to shoot an animal and quite another to shoot a man.

"Oh for an hour of Corkran !" was my thought ; and yet I did none so badly, for as my musket cracked, the hunter next that one I had aimed at leaped high in the air and fell forward on his face. The range was long, but it was apparent I could not miss. They were too closely packed together.

For the first time the hunters realised the white men were against them, and great was their consternation. Further, they were not acquainted with firearms, like the soldiers, and were filled with dread. The slaves were utterly astounded, and cast them-



We Fight for the King

395

selves on the ground and lay there motionless, covering their heads with their hands. I reloaded with all haste, and again sent a bullet into their ranks. It slew none, but must have inflicted a single wound at least. As the smoke cleared I saw a few of the more faint-hearted beginning to crowd out at the gate in the inner fence, intent on finding shelter. I withdrew from the window to reload, and thus it happened that Gozo's plans were utterly upset, and my chance of completing the discomfiture of the hunters at small loss to our side was ruined. Jacob Little was the man who ruined it. The smith took my place, and was so interested in what was passing that, forgetting the sill was low and his legs were long, he leaned far out, overbalanced, and, unable to save himself, went sliding down the steep, thatched roof. I let go the musket and sprang at his disappearing feet; but I was too late, and over the edge he dropped, still clutching his hammer. Fortunately the fall was trivial, and he had turned round so that he would land upon his side. Thus, though I heard a solid thud as the smith went to earth, I was not greatly concerned about his bones. Nor was there need. It was the bones of other folk which were in danger. Jacob speedily reappeared, and, being in a mortal hurry, as was ever his way when excited, he blundered against the second of the three fences which surrounded the palace, there being, as is apparent in the drawing, no gate at that part of it.

A gate here or there was, however, a small matter to the mighty smith. He recoiled, and then, swinging his hammer, brought it crashing down upon one of the posts. The latter broke across, and Jacob plucked out the upper part of it, and then tore a way through the reeds, dragging a great length of the palisade to the ground, much to the amazement of the spearmen who watched the loopholes and those who guarded the outer entrance. They made way for him, and with a shout the smith ran clumsily through the gap.

"Kunzi—kunzi! the bull—the bull!" yelled the stabbers, and, forgetful of their charge, made haste to follow such a leader.

"Sabe-Sabaka!" howled the warriors of the king's guard, and broke their ranks to let him pass.

sparingly. The press was so close about him that men could not wield even their short spears, and thus, as best he could, he singled out those who bore scarlet feathers, and brought his dread weapon crashing upon their skulls, In vain as men dropped, shields were thrust up as guards ; he beat them down. In vain they strove to close in upon him when he had cleared a space. He leaped at them, and they scattered, while the guard, keeping shoulder to shoulder, protected him in the rear. The smith, who had chafed at his captivity, was assuredly revelling in this fight. I recalled how he had dealt with the slaves aboard the *Kittiwake*, but then his heart was not in the conflict, while now he felt himself justified, for these were armed men he met, who, so to speak, were worthy of his steel.

Thus he fought, and gloried in his fighting, while Gozo stood apart and cursed him, for the little chief could ill afford to lose men, and not a few of the king's guard had fallen beneath the spear-thrusts of the hunters.

Moreover, a new danger arose. Jacob had drawn off those who guarded the immediate defences of the palace, and thus a half-dozen savages who had scaled the outer palisade in the rear found ready access. It was Gozo who first saw them, and he darted back to take up his stand at the archway, but was swept into the courtyard, as I could tell by the noise below me. I ran from the room and found him on the gallery at the head of the steps making good his stand against them.

"Ho, Kulolo !" he cried joyfully, and added something the meaning of which I did not then understand, but which I thereafter understood to signify that brains were better than brute strength.

Certainly it was well I had not joined Jacob, for my musket was of great service, and I picked off two of the enemy. Another batch, however, came crowding in from under the arch, and Gozo was wounded in the groin while I myself was struck in the shoulder by a throwing spear. Hitherto I had fought for the king ; now I fought for Cira even as we were driven back step by step and I had to ply the butt. These hunters battled with the courage of the beasts they hunted, and were all the fiercer in that

they had thought to gain plunder and meet with no resistance. They pressed me sorely till my breath was well-nigh spent, while even Gozo panted. Yet he had a great heart for so small a body, and stood by me stoutly, so that none passed us ; and Cira, I told myself, was yet safe. I imagined her crouching in terror in the room, but there I was wrong.

Five of our assailants were dead or wounded, but Gozo had received a second gash in the chest, while the stock of my musket was cracked. It would have gone hard with us had not help come from an unexpected quarter.

We were, as I have said, on the gallery which ran round the inner wall of the palace, and our assailants had forced us from the head of the steps and gained a footing, when from behind them a shrill voice sounded, and caused them to turn about in dismay.

"Corkran !" you cry, good reader, knowing his knack of appearing in the hour of peril and perchance longing for his presence even as I did. Not so ; the voice was that of the Portuguese, and at his side stood the girl Cira. She carried a short spear, as she had done when first I saw her, but there was no need for her to use it. At the sight of the king, whom, it afterwards appeared, they had believed to be dead—and indeed, as I have hinted, this had been one of the chief causes of the revolt—the rebel hunters cast down their weapons and fled with one accord across the courtyard, through the archway and the broken fences out into the open space, crying aloud in their own tongue :

"The king lives ! The king lives !"

Mark you, they had never before set eyes on Christopher Melinda, and yet they knew him at once to be the ruler of the realm. Better than any words of mine will this explain the masterful look of the old villain, his commanding presence, and the surprising strength and dignity of his voice. To be sure, his cloak of leopard-skin and curious headpiece of the same material may have brought conviction to our assailants ; but there was a flash in his keen black eyes and a rude magnificence in his pose, as he stood with one long arm outstretched, which of themselves was sufficient, while the very appearance of extreme age which he



We Fight for the King

399

presented conferred upon him a venerable air in keeping with his character.

Cira had slipped out of the room during the heat of the fight, and, hurrying unseen past our backs, had roused the old Portuguese, and fetched him forth, knowing the superstitious reverence in which he was held both by soldiers and by hunters. Her ruse had been successful, and we were saved—ay, and the greater conflict was likewise at an end, for as we stood there upon the gallery, Gozo and I dripping from our wounds and yet panting from our exertions, there arose a mighty clamour from without, and then there burst into the courtyard, with Jacob in their midst, the whole mob which had been warring desperately at the inner gate.

Dappled shields and crimson shields, vultures' features, and the red plumes of scarlet cranes, dark, unarmed menials, and wild, untamed, and liberated slaves—ay, even the women, both copper-coloured and black, swept in upon us in one eager, questioning throng, trampling underfoot Cira's garden and the bodies of those we had slain.

They were covered with sweat and blood ; they were breathing hard ; many were wounded, and all were full of uncontrolled excitement. But they no longer grappled at each others' throats. In they rushed, jostling one another in the mad stampede, and flocking together, wild of eye and hideous in aspect. Never had I witnessed such a scene ; and, strangest sight of all was Jacob Little towering head and shoulders above the tallest of them, his face streaked, his head bare, his eyes blinking vigorously as he strove to understand what it all meant. His hammer was gone ; nothing remained but the handle broken off where it had joined the head, and consequently his aspect was exceeding rueful. Like the rest, he had ceased to fight, and once the rush was at an end and the courtyard packed with the swaying multitude, he stood and scratched his white poll in puzzled surprise, and looked about him with his uninjured eye, while from well-nigh every other throat went up the cry of those who had fled before us :

"The king lives ! The king lives !"



CHAPTER XXXIII

THE KING'S DECREE

SUDDEN indeed, and in its way savouring of the dramatic, had been the termination of the struggle ; but I confess I did not see how all this uproar would end. For the space of half an hour the mob shouted aloud with the utmost vehemence, and all the time Melinda grasped the rail and looked down upon them. The noise was deafening, and though the king essayed to speak, his voice was drowned, and they would not hearken to him.

"The king lives !" they roared. "The king lives !" crying senselessly, like the Ephesians of old.

Gozo, faint with loss of blood, clung also to the rail ; but I supported him, made him lie down upon the boards, and Cira, perceiving his plight, brought me the wherewithal to staunch his wounds and bind them up.

The old chief was very grateful, and nodded his head and smiled grimly, repeating over and over again the only word I understood, to wit, "Kulolo." Thereafter the maid insisted on dressing my own shoulder, although the wound was none so serious. However, she was determined, and so by my directions, and I had to shout for her to hear me, she made a sling in which my arm might rest, and made fast the ends of it about my neck. I thrilled at the soft touch of her fingers, and sooth to say, she had never looked fairer than when thus employed upon a work of mercy. I contrasted her with the yelling horde below us, and could scarce conceive how so dainty a plant had been reared among such people.



The King's Decree

401

"'Tis little of Melinda's blood she has," was my unspoken thought, and concluded that her father must have been a very worthy fellow, the while I understood why the woman who had been her grandmother had been also the cause of so much dissension and the undoing of Luis da Cardoso. "This is no place for her," thought I, and then and there resolved to lead her forth from this savage home of hers, and bestow her amongst folk of her own colour and of the Christian faith.

It was an easy resolve to make; but my heart sank when I considered the difficulties which must lie before me. I was none too certain that Cira would come, for one thing; and how was she to face the perils of a journey to the sea, the deadly fever, the beasts of prey, the heavy toil beneath a burning sun, the danger from the savage, and the lack of wholesome water? Vain thoughts! I had but to glance aside, and there was the howling and excited multitude. It behoved me to consider the present rather than the future, for who could say how all this turmoil and vehemence was to end? Little, even at that moment, did I imagine how it was in reality to terminate; but the beginning of the end was suddenly announced by the roar of the great war-gong, pealing and bellowing above all other sounds, rising high even above the strident shout of those who roared: "The king lives, the king lives!"

"What might this portend?" I asked myself. "What new development was I to expect?"

As the sonorous clanging died away it left behind it a dead stillness, save for the breathing of many hurried breaths, the shuffling of many bare feet, and the occasional creak of wood yielding under pressure. A moment so, and then there was a disturbance at the archway. Some of the people slipped through it, and into the space thus made there pushed the form of Jan Van Wyk. Stooping low, he entered through the arch, and then reared himself erect, towering above the press even as Jacob towered, and faced the king unflinchingly. Some six of the soldiers followed him, and I knew he had returned from his quest, and was about to make his report. Great, therefore, was my anxiety.

I forgot all but Corkran; I forgot that the Dutchman's presence with his considerable body of men probably ensured peace, and would overawe the hunters—forgot what his return might mean to Cira and myself—was conscious only of a great eagerness to learn how my old man of the sea had fared. Was he dead, was he a prisoner, or had he once again proved himself to be, as I had declared to Melinda, a man hard to beat?

At sight of Jan Van Wyk, from whose impassive face one could gather nothing, Cira uttered a cry of dismay, but on this occasion sought the king's side, as though she esteemed him her proper protector. Gozo, lying propped up against the wall, drew his brows together in a frown, and I could see he did not relish the Dutchman's reappearance at this juncture. He mumbled to himself, and then, ashamed of showing any sign of emotion, filled his nostrils with snuff and turned his keen old face towards Melinda, who was quivering with passion at having been unable to make himself heard. The latter spoke at length in the tongue of Godwana, and the tones of his voice were bitter and scathing. I could not tell what he said, but his words had their due effect, and the people began to slink out quietly, like men under a curse.

Louder and louder shrilled the king's harsh, dissonant voice, and I, for one, feared he would lapse into another fit. But no; he stood leaning over the rail, and poured forth his wrath and fury on the mob, which melted away before him. The man had a strange power of utterance and a certain majesty about him, while the venom of his speech may not be described. Suffice it to say that he cleared the courtyard, till there remained none but the Dutchman and his six spearmen, Jacob Little, and those who had been trampled underfoot.

"Hambake!" commanded the king, and Jan Van Wyk drew near, caressing his thick beard and glancing about him with shifty eyes.

Thereupon the king questioned him quickly in the Portuguese, and Jan Van Wyk answered him readily and with a cool assurance, from which I argued the worst.

"Kulolo!" muttered Gozo, and added something which I

learned thereafter meant, "This man speaketh the truth, or is the father of lies himself."

In vain I endeavoured to discover what had happened ; and at length, being unable to remain any longer in doubt, I called out to Cira, asking her what Jan Van Wyk announced.

I was answered by the man himself.

"I do but give the king the news of the death of the kapitein who in times past slew my friend Obed Schryner," said he.

"And you lie!" I cried, though I could scarce doubt him, so steady his gaze, so unmoved his voice.

A slow smile gathered in the man's eyes, though his shaggy hair hid the twitchings of his mouth.

"I think not," he replied, "and as a proof I have brought this back with me!"

He thrust a hand within his coat, and presently withdrew a mass of rough and reddish hair, which I have once likened to a ship's mop.

It was the very wig of which Corkran was so proud.

A grim chuckle burst from Melinda, and he spoke to Cira.

"What says the king?" I asked, sick at heart, and striving against hope to be hopeful.

"He says he has beaten the man hard to beat," answered the girl sorrowfully.

"If so," I cried hotly, and with a voice full of grief and dismay, "I warrant he is not the only man who has died."

"That also is true," said Jan Van Wyk ; "he was a great fighter, was this Kapitein Corkran, the best I have ever known."

This last speech carried conviction with it ; and yet I strove to be a sceptic, for now, as ever, I relied on Captain Nicholas to bring things to a successful issue. Despite all my past experiences, I knew I was not fitted for this wild and violent life, while Jacob Little was even less suited to it. Corkran was our sheet anchor, and if he were gone, then indeed we would be in a sorry plight. Thus I mused hastily, and in much grief and perplexity ; but my thoughts were soon to be turned into another channel.

The king was finding fault with Jan Van Wyk, who had handed him the trophy. I gathered it was on account of the losses he

had sustained, for Corkran had made so stout a defence that half the Dutchman's party had fallen or were wounded. He himself had been grazed by a ball which carried off the tip of one ear. This sight gave me inward satisfaction; and yet I reflected that Captain William Catchpenny would have accounted it a bad miss and unworthy of a woodman of the Virginias. The king soundly rated Van Wyk; but all his rage had little effect on the stolid giant of a man, who, I was glad to note, was unarmed. The same fact, howbeit, testified to his courage.

Of a sudden an idea seemed to enter Melinda's head. He signed to Gozo, who whistled shrilly, as he had done at our first encounter, and certain of the king's guard entered. These received an order, and, after disappearing below the gallery, they reappeared with what I took to be the chair of state—a wooden seat mounted upon poles. It was caparisoned with crimson cloth and surmounted by a fringed canopy, and altogether was the only article I had seen which possessed a regal look.

Melinda mounted upon it with some difficulty, for his legs were tremulous, and he had all the hesitation and irritability of an old man. Once securely seated, four of the spearmen acted as bearers, and, others having entered, a procession was formed, Gozo being supported on the shoulders of two of the guard. The chair was lowered at the archway, and pushed through it, and we one and all followed, full of wonder as to what would happen next.

We passed over the broken second line of fence, and so out into the open space, where was gathered the whole community, and where the dead lay thick at the inner gate. Already there were signs that it would take but little to send the populace flying at each others' throats. Thanks to the Dutchman's return, the soldiers were slightly in the ascendancy, but many hunters had survived the fight; and these and their allies had drawn apart with faces black as thunder clouds and fingers itching at their spear handles. The sight of the royal chair and the royal personage, however, banished all such signs of slumbering ferocity.

"M'linda!" they shouted, and every man and woman—ay, even the children, for there were many such, threw themselves upon their faces and beat softly with their foreheads on the hard earth. It

appeared that the chair had not been seen for a generation, and the sight impressed these beholders as nothing else could have done. The poles, each carved, like Gozo's staff, to represent a snake with open mouth, remained on the shoulders of the bearers, and, thus borne aloft, the king spoke. Albeit the burden of his speech was unintelligible to me, I understood wherein much of the power of the Portuguese must have lurked. The man had the gift of oratory; his gestures, his quickly changing features, the modulations of his voice, all proclaimed the fact. At one time his speech was low and infinitely sad and mournful; at another he was sputtering in fiery eloquence. Now his utterance was bitter and scornful; anon it was so sweet and plaintive that one might have deemed him a lovesick maid. The power which Corkran wielded in song, this withered piece of humanity with the piercing eyes and the skinny fingers exercised in speech, but more abundantly and to greater purpose. The tongue of Godwana is musical, as I have said, and lends itself to the expression of the emotions, and never have I heard the passions which shake mankind so truly and convincingly expressed as by Christopher Melinda. If such was the effect of his words on me, conceive how they affected the dusky multitude before him. Soldiers, hunters, menials, slaves, women, and little children sat as though transfixed, nor uttered a sound till he had done. They were silent as the corpses at the gates—as he who hung head downwards on the fence; but as the king, leaning forward and pointing towards the southern cliff, finished in a whirlwind of words, the vessels pulsating in his temples and a dew of sweat upon his wrinkled skin, there went up a shout of jubilation and assent.

Whatever he had decreed it had found favour with his people, and, looking at their faces, aglow with excitement and expectation, I understood they anticipated something to their liking, and had lost all hatred of each other in their eagerness to put to the test this proposal of their king.

Cira's back was to me, and she was some distance away, so that she could not enlighten me. I gathered, however, she was in some way concerned, for her head was bent and her face buried in her hands. True, Gozo nodded and grinned as if to reassure

me, but I was impressed with a sense of impending danger. I had no opportunity to speak to Jacob Little, nor would I deign to address Van Wyk, though he was nearest me. The shout came and went, and in a moment we were ringed about by spear-men. My musket was useless, Jacob had nothing but the splintered handle of his hammer, the Dutchman had no weapon. I have since discovered this was a curious trait in his character. He was brave to rashness, and had a great love of being dependent on his own muscles and the sheer power and weight of his frame. Rarely would he condescend to use a knife or pistols, and to this day there are legends current at the Cape about Jan Van Wyk which if I were to retail might with some reason gain for me the title of a consummate liar. This, by the way, even as we were on our way.

The litter moved forward, and we perforce followed, passing through the inner gate, where were sights sufficient to turn a stout stomach, and which I was glad Cira did not witness, for she kept her eyes covered, and was led by old Maquita and one of the guard. We circled the fence and passed him who hung thereon by the hollows of his knees; we emerged at the outer gate, marching beneath the tusks of the elephant. Then, to the sound of drums and cow-horns, hastily gathered from the outer huts, we took our way up the slope towards the high barrier of cliff which descended to the great swamp, and faced the lonely land which stretched to the south.

I was too dazed to think, too wearied mentally to worry about the future, and I trudged onwards with some vague thoughts as to Corkran and Cira, and no clear idea of what might be required of me.

At length we reached a spot where were many stones and rocks full of those glittering specks of which I have made mention, and covered with patches of the yellow lichen. Amongst these we wound and emerged on a remarkable locality, a broad stretch of level sward surrounded on three sides by great blocks and irregular pillars and heaped-up masses of broken rock, which I could swear had at one time been fashioned and reared by a people skilled in masonry. Be that or not as it may, this open

site had, as I have said, three sides ; but it lacked a fourth, for the fourth was the naked cliff edge, a line of scattered stones and long grass, abrupt and sharp. One looked out upon space, upon an immensity of air, and afar off rose the hill ridges which bounded the other margin of the morass, and behind them a multitude of mountain-tops, ridged or rounded. In one place, through a gap in the surrounding rock, I could also see one of the lateral boundaries of the swamp, and noted it was fashioned like the knuckles of some gigantic hand, and that between two of these elevations was a streak of white marking where a high waterfall descended to feed the marshy waste.

I was not permitted to go near the edge, but knew that far below there swirled, night and morning, those clinging vapour masses which an eternity ago, as it seemed, had parted at the sun's kiss to let us view the false glitter that had lured us to this place of savagery and woe. Instinctively I knew the meaning of this rock-begirt space, with the level grass stretch and the verge leading to thin air, and I half guessed why we had been led thither.

It was the spot of execution. It, or rather the cliff base far below it, might have been named Golgotha, or the place of a skull.

I was right. In after days I learned that here justice had its sway and punishment was awarded, and that the bodies of the slain were hurled straightway to the vultures or oblivion over the beetling crags which faced the south.

Melinda, however, with that cunning which distinguished him, had ordained another spectacle than that of a mere butchery of defenceless men. He had quelled the last embers of the rebellion by announcing a spectacle calculated to furnish his savage retainers with all they sought and gloried in. The place was more or less of a natural amphitheatre, and the king had designed a show of gladiators, a combat on whose issue was staked the succession to his throne and the hand of Cira, his granddaughter. Such was the amazing resolve which had been hatched within his crafty brain. Jacob Little had gained the admiration of the soldiery by his deeds of prowess ; the Dutchman had got himself feared and



hated, and had even lost favour with the king, owing to the heavy slaughter Corkran had inflicted in the efforts made to kill or capture him. The trophy—a bloodless one—was not enough to satisfy Melinda, although it had well-nigh satisfied me. Moreover, the king was very old, and his strength was failing; he desired a successor, as he had once done before—ay, and a husband and protector for the fair maid whom he loved in his own way. He had promised her to Jan Van Wyk; but when he saw a way to secure peace and gratify his people, and perhaps also to satisfy his own craving after excitement and to quicken his feebly coursing blood, he set his promise aside and devised another expedient.

There were two white men who alone were in his opinion fit to mate with the white maid. “Good,” said he; they should do battle for her and for his own throne.

You ask, worthy reader, how he explained the matter to us? He did so by Cira herself. It was the refinement of cruelty to make the girl deliver such a message; but the man was a savage at heart, brutalised by his years of slave-trading in the wilderness, and lost to those refinements which civilisation and a Christian faith have imposed on Europeans. The whole situation was peculiar in the extreme; but I was pained exceedingly for Cira, who at first refused to say aught, and then only announced part of the decree, but because Jan Van Wyk understood English and had guessed the king’s wishes, was forced to tell all. She could scarce find words to do so, and great was her shame and confusion, so that I would have joyed to fight the Dutchman myself, even though he would speedily have mastered me. My own fate was not announced; but I dreaded the worst, and especially if Jacob were overcome.

Stranger still were the terms of the combat. The men were to fight as they were, without weapons, trusting solely to their thews and sinews and the stoutness of their hearts. It was curious to see how they received this decree. The Dutchman could not conceal a look of satisfaction, and his grey eyes twinkled with the anticipation of a coming triumph. He had no qualms as to his own prowess, that was evident; and so cool and calm and self-



The King's Decree

409

assured was his demeanour that I was much impressed, and felt uneasy as to Jacob.

That worthy mortal was in an ecstasy. His great desire on earth was gratified, for he was about to pit his strength against a man who was at least his equal in bulk and weight and mightiness of muscle. A broad smile broke out upon his face, which wrinkled till his eyes vanished; and he blinked genially on the king and heaved a sigh of huge content. He was like a child which has been promised a new toy or a comfit, and at last sees it at hand. That he was not certain of the result I knew full well. Time and again he had declared to me that he feared Jan Van Wyk was more than a match for him, and the thought had been a source of much worry to his simple brain. Now he had an opportunity of confirming or confuting his uncertainty, and I had not seen him so pleased or like his old self since the day he mastered Squire Pumphret's stallion in the smithy of Bishop-Solingford. For all that his honesty forced him to speak.

"Tell the king," said he to the Dutchman, "that I have no wish to rule and no fancy for any maid, but that I will fight you for the love of it."

Van Wyk smiled till I saw those strong white teeth, the sight of which had chilled me on the *Kittiwake*.

"You have a great heart, Meinheer, though your name belies your body," said he. "But see, we will not tell the king. I also will put aside the thought of gain, and fight you for the love of it, and there is my hand upon the bargain."

"Art a worthy fellow, after all," cried Jacob, and reached out his palm; but I had my own doubts, fearing that the Dutchman lied, and that this was but a cunning way of overcoming any ill-will Jacob might have towards him, and so weakening the intensity of his resolve to be the victor.

Well did Van Wyk know the influence of the mind over the muscle. Perchance I was uncharitable, for the Dutchman, like all his race, had good qualities—to wit, determination, courage of a sort, no love of luxury, and a delight in the more manly virtues and in adventurous exploits. Yet was he cunning, ruthless, with a cool pride which was perhaps justified in his case, and as



careless of a lie or a theft as he was of his personal safety. But above everything else he was of a magnificent physique. Both men stripped to the waist, the sun being none too hot at this altitude, and I saw the fulfilment of the promise his lean and starved frame had given aboard the *Kittiwake*. He was thin now, but it was the hard leanness of a tried and trained body. His massive frame was closely knit, his muscles swelled out upon his bones, and from his ribs stood forth in cords like huge outspread fingers. I noted especially the great smooth spread of his shoulder muscle as it overlapped the joint and was tucked away amongst its fellows, where it joined the bone. I remarked the curving breadth and the depth of his enormous chest. His back was heaped with firm flesh masses, and he was exceeding hairy—a sign, I take it, of undoubted strength. Only in the legs did he show any symptom of weakness, and that only by comparison. The calves thereof scarcely filled the eye as did the rest of him; and yet those muscles I knew, from the condition of my own, must be as tough as whipcord.

I turned to Jacob, and at the first glance he made a more perfect picture of rugged power. His skin was smoother and whiter than the Dutchman's, but his muscles showed to better advantage, and were in more evident knots and mounds. His bones were also huge, his back even broader than that of his antagonist; but, surveying him critically, I had most sadly to confess he was not so well built a man. True, his arms were immense. Developed to their utmost by his trade, they were such limbs as might have graced a Hercules—a mass of ridged fibres and irregular swellings where certain portions stood out tense beneath the skin. As is the way with Englishmen, his legs were also great, and he stood firmly upon them; but his whole frame was loosely hung together, his shoulder girdles were prominent, his neck a trifle long, though very sinewy. He lacked the Dutchman's compactness, was more angular and bony, and was not so well proportioned. For the rest, there was nothing between them in height, though the Dutchman appeared to be the heavier; but while Jacob, with his white hair and round, good-humoured face and blinking lids, looked like an overgrown

boy, Jan Van Wyk, bearded like the Pard, with brown and lined visage, keen grey eyes, and long dark hair, resembled some warrior of the Goths. One thought consoled me: Jacob had youth on his side, and less to lose, and the fine fighting-spirit of our island race. Another troubled me greatly: the smith would be sorely hampered by his defective vision, for the day was bright and clear.

"Have a care, lad!" I cried out anxiously; but my voice angered the king, and at his command a spearman—one of two who guarded me closely—struck me on the mouth, so that I perceived I was to have no say in this encounter.

Jacob was too excited and absorbed to heed me, nor did I then appreciate the light of a great resolve which came into his face.

A murmur of surprise and admiration went up from the spectators as they feasted their eyes on two such mighty specimens of humanity; and then they took up their places amongst the surrounding rocks, the past forgotten, oblivious of everything but the approaching contest. A ring of soldiers armed with shields and spears interposed between them and the central figures in this singular and impressive spectacle.

Melinda, whose chair had been set down within the arena, leaned forward eagerly and scanned the combatants. Then, chuckling to himself, he gave the signal to begin; and all the time Cira sat beside him, her face buried in her hands.

"I seek a man stronger than myself." I recalled Jacob's words of long ago, and prayed that he might not have found what he had so eagerly desired only to his own undoing; and then with bated breath I fixed my eyes on the green and level spread of dry and grassy ground and on the figures of the fighters. There was plenty of room for them to move about, nor was any restriction placed upon the methods to be employed. They were there as God had made them, and one had to master the other as best he could and with those weapons wherewith Nature had endowed him.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE TRIAL BY COMBAT

It was Jan Van Wyk who opened the attack. Drawing back and crouching a little, he hurled himself at the smith, seeking to upset him or to close with him. He received an unexpected rebuff, and found there are other modes of personal warfare than mere wrestling.

Jacob had been the youngest of seven, and thus it was no wonder he had learned to use his fists, especially when one considers their size and weight. His back was to the sun, and he saw the Dutchman coming. As a result his left arm shot out from the shoulder, and his knuckles took Van Wyk fairly on the forehead with a crack like that of an exploding pistol. It was a blow sufficient to fell an ox, and the great Dutchman went staggering backwards, his arms outstretched before him, his body bent, his legs giving way at the knees.

"On to him, Jacob!" I yelled, but the haft of a spear was thrust into my mouth and drew blood. Then I was gagged, and so remained a mute witness of all that passed.

To my dismay the smith did not follow up his advantage, but let Van Wyk recover. It is well to be chivalrous, no doubt, but too much depended on the issue in this case for one adversary to give the least chance to the other. I groaned as I saw the Dutchman gather himself together or ever the shout which the smith's blow elicited from the bystanders had died away.

I read no gratitude for Jacob's clemency in Van Wyk's eyes. The man's rage was roused, but he saw the need of caution. He

rose slowly, and got back his breath the while he caressed his beard and measured his antagonist with eyes into which had come a steely glitter. The smith, as was his way, smiled genially, and kept upon his guard as though inviting a fresh onset. Then Van Wyk, keeping well out of reach, began to circle round him. Here again he had reckoned without his host. He did not know that in the English method there is attack as well as defence. Thus he took no precautions to protect his face, and walked round his opponent, waiting for a chance to get at close grips. Instead of finding it, he received another tremendous buffet, this time on the jaw. The smith, seizing his opportunity, sprang at him and delivered a second crashing stroke, which drove the Dutchman sideways and brought blood streaming from his mouth, and caused him to spit and choke.

Again Jacob did not drive home his advantage; but Van Wyk had learned his lesson.

The dusky crowd were speechless with astonishment at this exhibition of defence and attack, and no noise greeted the smith's effort, save a fierce snarl of pain and wrath which came from his enemy's throat.

So far Van Wyk had borne the Englishman no hatred. Now he was consumed with passion, and I saw with feelings of dread that this would be a combat *à l'outrance*—that one or other of these men must die. Jacob would be forced in his own interests to slay the Dutchman, if, indeed, the Dutchman, grown cool and wary, did not succeed in killing him.

Again I cursed the folly of my friend and comrade in not making certain of his foe thus early. A few such blows would effectually cripple even a giant like Van Wyk. Either of them would have shattered the bones of any ordinary man. As it was, I could not be certain that his lower jaw had not sustained a fracture.

Once more Jacob stood on guard, and once more the Dutchman wandered round him; but now he held his clenched hands before his face—awkwardly, it is true, but in such a way that he could not be taken by surprise. Round he went, and ever Jacob kept his front to him. And then I saw Van Wyk's plan. He was

trying to get Jacob to face the westering sun, so that his eyes might be dazzled. I tried to get free from the gag, so that I might warn my friend, but was held fast by my guards, and could only stare with straining eyes and fear clutching at my heart.

Presently it was even as the Dutchman wished, and the smith found himself blinded by the sudden glare, and began to peer about him uneasily. Then Van Wyk made his rush. Jacob, however, was no fool in such matters, and, expecting some such ruse, leaped a little to the side and thrust out a leg. His opponent drove full against it, tripped upon it, and shot onwards a sprawling mass. In a moment the smith whirled about and aimed a blow at the back of his head. It is my belief it would have ended the fight had it caught Van Wyk behind the ear; but unhappily Jacob slipped, his fist struck out into the air, and he also fell even as the spectators roared with laughter. That laughter ceased suddenly, for the next moment the two men were locked in each other's embrace. Then began a fearful struggle for the mastery.

By mutual consent, as it seemed, each gained his feet, and then each tightened his hold, the Dutchman with a hoarse grunt of satisfaction.

There was no wrestlers' grip. It was a case of catch as catch can; and while Van Wyk had Jacob by the throat with one hand and one arm thrown round his neck, the smith had both his arms about his assailant's body, and was hugging him to himself. The Dutchman squeezed and Jacob squeezed, and the latter had the purchase. Feeling himself choking, he put out all his force and swung Van Wyk clean off his legs. The Dutchman suddenly shifted his grasp, regained his footing, and closed yet more closely. It was to me a relief to see Jacob's throat free; but Van Wyk had now got one arm round his body, while still holding his head down by that which circled his neck.

Each strove desperately, and when I got a glimpse of the smith's face I saw that at last he was fully alive to his peril. His geniality was gone; he was hot and flushed and angry, for he must have suffered severe pain when Van Wyk compressed his windpipe. He tried to wrench himself free, so that he might strike the Dutchman as before; and had he succeeded, I warrant there would



The Trial by Combat

415

have been no hesitation on his part in pressing home the least advantage. He tried, I say, and failed. Strong though he was, the Dutchman was stronger, and held him as though in a vice.

The minutes passed, and still this Titanic encounter continued. I doubt if the smith had ever bargained for such a contest, without rules or any set plan or any kind of method. At first he seemed scarcely to understand ; and then, as it slowly dawned upon him that Van Wyk would stop at nothing in his endeavours, and was striving to break his neck, and had tried to take him by surprise, he changed his tactics and fought him on his own lines, asking nothing, giving nothing save his whole mind and body to the task he had in hand.

Thereafter I scarce know what happened for a space. These two huge men tore and worried at each other, and their muscles quivered and grew tense. They heaved and strained and swayed ; they swung this way and that, and staggered hither and thither, and the sweat poured from them, and there was a smear of red upon their skins. Once they fell apart, only to grapple again instantly without thought or sense, blind with rage, mad with the lust of battle, furious with each other's stubbornness and strength. At times they wrestled, at times they struck with clenched fists. I saw Jacob deliver one buffet which broke Van Wyk's nose and bathed his face crimson ; I heard a bone snap in Jacob's chest.

I cannot write of it, I cannot bear even to think of it. To the savages about it was a glorious sport—to them and to the brutalised Portuguese who had had the ordering of it. But Cira was wholly overcome, and I myself sickened and longed that it might end at any cost—ay, even at the expense of Jacob's life. And at last it seemed as though this would be the case. For a full half-hour they had been grappling on the ground, rolling over and over, when suddenly I noticed that Van Wyk was uppermost, and was about to slay the smith, who, apparently exhausted, released his hold and lay motionless, save for the heaving of his chest and a flicker in his closed eyelids.

Further, I perceived they were not far from the edge of the precipice, and, from what I had seen, it seemed as though Jacob had latterly been forcing the fight in that direction. The Dutch-

man knelt upon the smith's body, and reared and steadied himself for a final effort, when from Jacob there burst forth a cry.

"It is the only way!" he shouted, with a voice which showed how spent he was. "Doctor Harry, it is the only way!"

Then in a moment he raised himself partly from the ground, flung his arms about Van Wyk, and, heedless of a blow which fell upon his back, started rolling again, now the Dutchman uppermost, anon himself.

A shrill cry broke from the king, and four spearmen bounded forward; but they were too late.

A moment the struggling mass was balanced on the verge, and I saw a hairy arm shoot out and a great hand clutch convulsively at a tuft of grass which yielded at the roots; then over they plunged, nor was there ever a sound till, after a space, there came from afar such a noise as is made by a heavy stone dropping upon the surface of a still water in a well of great depth.

Then, blind fool that I had been, I understood, and knew that Jacob had sacrificed himself for me. He had seen that I was taken with the maid, and he knew that she would be forced to wed him did he triumph. He knew also that my life would be worth little did he perish and the Dutchman survive. Thus he had slain himself and Van Wyk at the selfsame time. So, at least, I believed, and ever must believe, and must ever sorrow for my friend—simple, trusting, and very lovable, a veritable son of Anak, and yet of an abiding good-nature and geniality. It may be I have scarce done him justice, nor fully pictured his traits and peculiarities; but I have done my best, and have not the heart to write more concerning him when I think of how he died.

At the time, however, nothing could hold me. I broke from my guard, heedless of a spear-thrust in the side. I sprang down the rocks, across the space where the grass was trampled and bruised, and so to the cliff edge, which I reached even before the spearmen who had darted forward to prevent the tragedy.

Flinging myself down, I looked over at the dizzy height, full two thousand feet of rugged crag sinking to the confines of the swamp. My head swam dizzily, my flank pained me, and I was

losing blood. Therefore, for a moment, I could not believe I really saw that which I did see. Straight below me the cliff-face sank unbroken to the foot of the abyss, save for a few stunted bushes which clung to it, and little knobs and projections, whereon birds nested, and which were spotted with their dung. There was no sign of those who had rolled over the verge and gone sweeping downwards to their doom—there was no sign of them, I say, but somewhat to the side a narrow ledge projected into thin air, and on the ledge was the figure of a man.

He was three hundred feet below me, and, like me, he was looking toward the place where Jacob and Van Wyk must have landed—some noisome pool of the great morass. His head was bent, and what was very remarkable was that though he stood on the very margin of the ledge, yet was he able to gaze at the abyss below him without having hold of anything to steady him. This alone would have convinced me as to his identity had I needed any proof, but none was wanted. Dwarfed though the figure was by the distance, I made out a musket slung across its back, and I knew the broad, square build of it; and I knew that Van Wyk had lied, and that though I had lost one comrade, I had found another.

I tore away the gag in a frenzy of haste—my lips bleeding, my teeth tingling; but it mattered not. I clapped my hands on either side of my mouth, and—

“Corkran!” I shouted. “Corkran!”

He heard, and while I was even cursing my folly in thus startling him when in so precarious a position, he turned about, and looked up at me and waved a hand. Then, without a moment's hesitation, he sprang at the cliff-face and began the ascent. Nothing but a monkey or a sailor could have accomplished such a task; but I watched him as he crawled upwards like a fly, never pausing, though seeming to hang at times by his very finger-nails.

I was not long given a chance of witnessing this feat, for the spearmen seized me and dragged me backwards. Even then I noted with satisfaction that not one of them took a survey as I had done. They knew the place, and they knew that no one could pass the edge and live; and, moreover, they had the king's

mandate to obey. Melinda was on his feet, with one arm outstretched and a forefinger pointing at me. His features still bore traces of the excitement into which the contest had thrown him. There was a dew of sweat on his forehead, his eyes sparkled, his thin lips were all a-quiver and tremulous. Holding on to one of the chair-poles, he craned his long body forward and issued his command.

What it was I did not doubt. He had no love of me. He remembered those words of mine which had thrown him into a fit, and he was afraid. So were those who held me, for the story of my deed had gone abroad, and I was looked on as a wizard; while the hunters had reason to dread me, also, as one who slew from afar. I alone knew how little cause they had to fear me, for every moment I was growing weaker. I had passed through too much in too short a space, and my wound had been but the finishing touch. Cira could not plead for me. The old woman Maquita had led her away weeping and sore distressed, and she was somewhere out of sight amongst the pile of rocks and boulders.

It was apparent I must die, unless, indeed, Corkran brought me succour. I was forced down upon my knees; but Gozo threw himself, wounded as he was, before the king, and I knew he begged for my life. The least delay was welcome, even though, now that Jacob Little was gone, I cared not so greatly for existence. Yet none in health, not even the most bereaved, not even the most saintly, the most assured of Paradise, craves for his dissolution. There is a dread of the unknown, however strong be faith,—a clinging to what is seen and understood; and so I struggled feebly with my executioners, and strove to gain time. Gozo was spurned by the king's foot, and, finding all was hopeless, he rose and came towards me.

"Kulolo!" said he, and, reaching up both hands, laid them on my head. I confess I was touched by his solicitude. The bystanders grew clamorous, some crying for the end, others, I have been told, protesting vehemently. In some the appetite for blood had but been whetted; in others it was already satiated. Yet was there more to be spilt ere that eventful day was

done, for suddenly there cropped up above the grass stems on the cliff-edge, there peered over the verge of the precipice, the most extraordinary of visages. Brown, as though stained by walnut-juice, scarred deeply upon the temple, with fierce black eyes, with a great beak of a nose, with a thin slit of a mouth, with a straggle of grey beard, and with an ear lacking on the right side, it rose into view, clear cut against the declining light of day. Nor was this all. Where there should have been hair, or at least baldness, or at least a head-covering, there was none. A mottled, parchment-like vault, with a tangle of twisted cords upon it, surmounted this keen and mocking face, from the mouth of which came a loud and hearty greeting.

A great silence fell, and the people stared awestruck at this apparition, no doubt believing I had summoned some familiar spirit from the depths. A woman wailed feebly, a child whimpered, and the spearmen loosed their hold on me.

"Ho, ho, Doctor Harry!" came the hail. "Split me! if old Nick be not here in the nick of time!"

With that Corkran reared himself upon his arms, got a knee planted on solid ground, and in a second was upon his feet.

A shrill cry went up from the king, who snatched a spear from one of his guards; but it was his last utterance and his last action. In a trice Corkran's musket was unslung and at his shoulder, his head dropped to the stock, his eye glanced along the barrel, and his finger tightened on the trigger. The flash as the hammer fell was the last thing I saw, the report the last I heard, for, overcome by conflicting emotions, weakened by loss of blood, and feeling that at length things were under the control of one who could control them, I let my senses leave me—my latest thought, as far as I can remember, being that after many a long year Nicholas Corkran had fulfilled his promise, and carried out the vengeance of Luis da Cardoso, the Portuguese.

CHAPTER XXXV

VAARWEL!

My tale, I take it, is at an end. It has been a recounting of the perilous and peculiar travels of three men, and, as I have shown, one of them parted company and set forth on another journey from which there is no return. Therefore is it fitting to conclude. It has been a tale of a quest for gold and the unknown by three good comrades, and one has indeed discovered the latter ; therefore why should I write further of what happened ? It has been a story of manifold adventurings safely accomplished ; but we have reached one in which a dire calamity befell. How, then, can I have the heart to continue this, my narrative ?

Yet I will try, and that briefly, for a broken tag of a tale is not seemly ; and when for some there is happiness in store, it is fitting that such should be mentioned as an offset to the troubles and sorrows of this our life on earth.

Again, some matters may not yet be plain and clear to the duller of my readers, if any such there be ; and I would not have them imagine me a liar who must perforce leave gaps because he cannot fill them.

Learn, then, that I lay long ill ; but when, most mercifully spared, I crept back to life and sense, I found a great change in the savage community hidden away in the African wilderness. Melinda was dead, shot by Corkran as he was about to slay me with his own hand ; and in his stead there ruled my old man of the sea, who, with that surprising power of his in grasping a situation, had done the right thing at the right time. He had found his wig lying on the king's seat, where Melinda had left it.

To the absolute astonishment and admiration of the natives, he had at once assumed his own hair, and thereby, in their eyes, completed a miracle. True, it sounds ludicrous in the extreme ; and, as told by Corkran, made me laugh till my wound burst forth afresh, and till he was driven from the room by Cira, who had tended me with a care to which I owed my recovery. Yet, after all, the thing was natural enough, as the unbiassed must confess. There are those who sneer at aught that is improbable and beyond their ken. Let them fare foreign, and woo adventures, and have experiences showered upon them, and they will return wiser—if they return at all.

Further, the old rip discovered that Gozo understood Portuguese, and—for he had a wonderful way with savage folk—the head-man was speedily his staunch ally. The soldiers who had been with Jan Van Wyk recognised that this was the strange white man who had defied them and committed such havoc in their ranks. They dreaded him accordingly, and, like the rest, who were utterly bewildered and amazed and full of admiration, promptly paid him homage. He had made one enemy, however, for Cira could not forgive him for having killed the king. Poor maid ! The old villain was her sole relative on earth, and, though he merited little at her hands, she was true-hearted, and took a violent dislike to Captain Nicholas.

That worthy had speedily taken over the direction of affairs ; had buried the dead, including Melinda ; had sent out an expedition to recover the bodies of Jacob and the Dutchman, but without avail ; had rendered himself popular by his distribution of the wives of those who had fallen in battle ; and had been mightily disgusted to find a kingdom of gold existed only in his imagination and in the imaginations of those more credulous than himself.

“Yet am I minded to stay, Doctor Harry,” said he. “The trade in slaves is good, as is that in ivory and hides ; and I have a fancy to be a ruler for a brief space, even in such a forsaken spot as this Godwana. Like our friend Van Wyk, of whom you have told me, I have not come here for nothing.”

“So it would seem,” said I. “You have been the cause of a few deaths.”

"And of your life being saved, my lad."

"That," I replied, "I am willing to admit; yet I owe much also to the maid."

"A murrain on her!" said he. "You had best away and wed her."

I laughed feebly, and then grew grave.

"It were scarce just," I protested. "She has known scarce any besides me, and I would not take an unfair advantage."

"Stap my vitals!" cried Corkran, "were it not that you have a certain decency and steadfastness about you, Doctor Henry Mortimer, you would be the most priggish of prigs. Range alongside, my lad, ere ever another craft can summon her, for this wearing and tacking is but a poor game."

"Nay, nay," said I, too weak to be offended at his unmerited remark, "you do not understand, and, moreover, she has no surname!"

"Now flay me for a land lubber!" he cried, chuckling till his beard shook. "And can you not give her one, most sapient of physicians? Ho, ho! my cock, I warrant she will be ready enough—though what she sees in you passes my humble comprehension."

"Tell me," said I, none too pleased at the turn the conversation had taken, "how you fared yourself?"

"A degree better," said he, "than when I had to look after two men as ignorant as babes. Yet," he added, seeing I was pained, "I allow poor Jacob was a worthy fellow, and I have grieved also at his loss; but such a man would have found it hard to worry through life."

"Mayhap," I answered—"mayhap," and for a time was silent.

Then Corkran told me all: how he had heard my warning shout, and, approaching carefully, had slain all six spearmen with his arrows, after he had taken up a good position amongst the rocks, whence they had tried in vain to dislodge him. Further, he recounted the whole of his experiences with Van Wyk, whom he had led a pretty dance. He had been forced, however, to seek shelter high up the cliff in a cavern, which opened off the ledge on which I had seen him, and where he was in danger of starvation. In the ascent he had lost his wig, and the Dutchman, securing

the trophy, and finding he could not attack with any prospect of success, and fearing what might happen in his absence, had drawn off his forces, after Corkran had accounted for half of them, though he had been injured by a throwing-spear.

It was a stirring recital he gave me, but too lengthy to transcribe in full, and beside the mark. His wound had healed sufficiently to permit of his scaling the cliff to the summit ; but till then he had lain hid, subsisting on certain rock conies which abound in these parts. He had seen Jacob and the Dutchman fall, and had been at a loss to understand what was occurring, but had never hesitated to respond to my summons.

In every way it was a remarkable coincidence, but I set it down without comment, and with much thankfulness, and a belief that I was spared to do some good in life.

Yet was there further trouble, for it was the people's wish that Cira should wed their new ruler,—the more so that they believed me also to be dead, for Corkran had kept the knowledge of my illness and recovery a secret. Gozo was our friend, though he had transferred his allegiance to Corkran ; and thus it befell eventually that, as I could not approve this traffic in slaves, and hankered after civilisation, and longed to take Cira with me, she being ready to come, I, at last, having sufficiently recovered, parted from Nicholas Corkran, yet not without regret. He sent us away privily in charge of Gozo and a band of trusty spearmen, and we travelled by night, crossing the ridge to the north, and descending into the great game valley where her father had lost his life.

We travelled by easy stages through a very wild and wonderful and well-watered country, till, after many hardships and the death of Maquita,—a sore grief to the maid,—we reached the settlement of the Portuguese, whose boundless curiosity we were hard put to it to satisfy.

This is no love tale, so it boots not to tell of what we said and how we said it and a multitude of other matters. We were wed in due course, took ship from the Bay de la Goa, and touched at Bubolongo. There I recovered the money we had obtained for the ketch, and which had lain safely buried. Cira hated the sea, was greatly bewildered with many novelties, and, being brought

near death by illness, we quitted the ship at the Cape, and there have I settled, finding I was not recognised as the comrade of that man who had created so great an uproar.

I made myself known to the Scotch community, who, mindful of their promise, received me kindly; and my services being required by the governor during an outbreak of the scurvy, I decided to remain for the nonce, the climate being indeed magnificent, and a livelihood most easy to obtain; while, as Corkran once remarked, the Dutch are a very decent folk, though, like others, they have their faults.

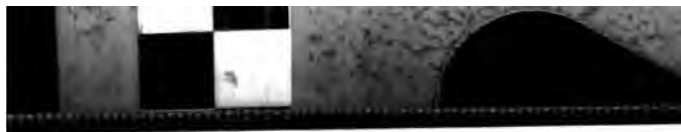
I had no ties in England; but to the vicar I wrote, and from him have had several letters, while he has sent me my precious books and much news, of interest only to myself, though I may state the fact that Abel Pike, for the time being, cheated the devil of his due.

Concerning that amazing man Corkran the Coxswain, I have nothing more to tell. Strange indeed was his influence upon my life, and at times I can scarce credit the reality of all I passed through in his cheerful and stimulating and peculiar company. Nor do I despair of again seeing him. To him the sea air was as the breath of life, and I doubt not but that he will tire of his new rôle and the doubtful glory of his position. We were both much moved at parting, for he had for me a warm corner in his seared and flinty heart, and at the least I had stood by him in his extremity. Thus, some day, I look to find him come a-sailing into Table Bay, and hope to spin a fresh yarn with him, and listen to his surprising manner of speech, and be spellbound by his singing, as of yore. He has still, as far as I know, his bauble and his chart, of which I made a careful copy, for we found the stone in the hut where I battled with the Dutchman for life itself.

It led us on a false quest, and was the occasion of this strangest of strange narratives; yet do I rest well content—for if Corkran has gained a kingdom, it is not one of gold, while I am the proud possessor of a princess whom I know, and that right verily, to be more precious than the precious metal.

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